Jaffas in the suburbs – the cinemas of Sydney's eastern fringe

John Walter Ross


SWEETACRES
JAFFAS
SOLID CHOCOLATE
WITH DELICIOUS ORANGE
SHELL CASING

“The showing of cinematograph pictures has now developed into a permanent business of extensive proportions, and temporary structures which were erected in the suburban areas during the speculative period of the business and which are of a more or less make-shift character have served their purpose.

The time has arrived when these temporary structures in the interests of the public should be replaced with permanent up-to-date buildings…for the safety, health and comfort of the public”.

Under Secretary, Chief Secretary’s Department, 15 September 1920.

Cover photograph:
Premier Theatre, Surry Hills, 1942 (State Library of NSW).

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Foreword

Vaudeville and other forms of live theatre dominated popular entertainment throughout the nineteenth century. After the invention of the Cinematographe by the Lumiere brothers to capture moving images, the first films were shown in Sydney at the Tivoli Theatre in 1895, and the first film made in Australia depicted the Melbourne Cup in 1896. But the initial excitement faded, and the last Sydney picture house closed in 1899. Interest was renewed by the arrival of two British entrepreneurs, Charles Spencer and T. J. West. They both established production companies and permanent picture theatres by 1908 and proceeded to rejuvenate the fledgling industry.

Initially, it was expected that motion pictures would just be brief recordings of everyday events, but before long their narrative and dramatic potential was realised, and within a decade multi-reel stories of an hour or more were being produced, including *The Story of the Kelly Gang* in 1906. By 1911, cinema was the most popular form of entertainment in Sydney, and several picture theatres were operating in the eastern fringe of the city. The suburbs considered for this history run from the south to the north of the CBD: Redfern, Surry Hills, Darlinghurst, Paddington and King's Cross.

Going out to see live theatre was always a special occasion, and the new picture theatres often tried to maintain this feeling with glamorous decorations and velvet curtains, showing the latest releases from the big American studios. But in the poorer parts of Sydney such as those described here, proprietors could initially only afford basic facilities such as open-air enclosures with simple bench seating, showing second and third release films. Despite this, cinema-going became so popular that half the population attended regularly.

Almost half the picture theatres in this history began operation in the first decade from 1906 to 1916. They ranged from the very short-lived: the Thripelodeon (1906-1907), Crown Star No. 1 (1912-1914) and the Imperial in Yurong Street (1913-c1915) to those that survived to the modern era: Australian Picture Palace/Tatler/Park/Paris (1916-1977), King's Cross Theatre (1916-1963), and the Olympia/Odeon/Academy Twin (1911-2010). Theatre names ranged from the very popular, such as the Empire (Darlinghurst, Paddington and Redfern), and the Star (two in Surry Hills, one in Redfern) to the obscure: the Thripelodeon, the Emu and the Trudamite. Many theatres were renamed throughout their life, and they are arranged in order of the original name in this history.

The gradual transition from the era of live entertainment, when a patron would pay a few shillings to watch up to fifteen variety acts in an evening to then pay only sixpence for two feature films with musical accompaniment was difficult for the entertainment industry (but great for the patrons). In time, the performers found themselves unemployed unless they could find work in the movies, the musicians were relegated to the background, and many other stage workers were replaced by a single projectionist. But the biggest change came with the advent of talkies in the late 1920s. Musicians were not needed at all, and many silent-era actors with accents or discordant voices found themselves out of favour.

Despite the changes, suburban cinemas did well enough until after World War II, when the cost of living rose steadily and the big production studios struggled to maintain an audience. But the real death blow to suburban cinema was dealt by television, commencing in Australia with the 1956

Melbourne Olympics, but having the most impact from about 1959. It is striking how many suburban cinemas that were still operating in the mid-1950s did not survive the decade.

The four cinemas still operating in the area of this history all commenced operation in 1977 or later. They all cater to the modern trend of small theatres of a few hundred seats, a wide choice of films and a high standard of facilities and refreshments. Suburban cinema has been threatened in turn by television in the 1950s, VCRs in the 1970s and home theatre systems playing DVDs in the 2000s, but it lives on by finding new ways to provide a better viewing experience for film lovers.

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Between vaudeville and television - cinema in Sydney

Entertainment in the nineteenth century

Before the era of movies, popular entertainment came in many forms. There were travelling companies touring around cities and towns, such as circuses, medicine shows and Wild West shows. Apart from these, amusement parks and town halls provided cleaner and more family-oriented entertainment, while saloons, music halls and burlesque houses catered for more risqué tastes.

In the early 1880s, vaudeville incorporated these itinerant amusements into a stable, institutionalised form in America's main urban centres. In 1881, the New York impresario Tony Pastor began to feature "polite" variety shows in several of his theatres. They were designed to appeal to the middle class sensibilities and spending power of the time. The emphasis of vaudeville theatre owners was on polite entertainment that was equally acceptable to men, women and children.

The invention of motion pictures

In 1891, Thomas Edison's industrial research laboratory at Menlo Park, New Jersey, laid the foundation for the motion picture industry with the development of the Kinetograph and the Kinetoscope. The Kinetograph was a photographic device that captured sequential images, and the Kinetoscope was a viewing device for an individual to look at these photos[1]. Motion pictures came to Sydney in November 1894 when Edison Kinetoscopes were installed in a shop in Pitt Street for individual viewers.

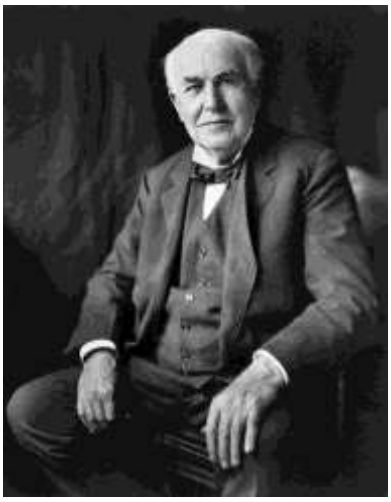


Figure 1 Thomas Edison

Edison did not secure an international copyright for his film inventions, so similar devices were quickly developed around the world. In 1895, the Lumiere brothers (Louis and Auguste) created the Cinematographe in France. This was a more practical device than Edison's because it combined a camera, film processor and projector all in one unit[2]. Because it was hand-cranked, the device was more portable than Edison's electrically-powered camera. It weighed only 16 pounds and provided sharper edges and better illumination than Edison's devices.

Figure 2 Lumiere brothers

But probably the greatest advantage over Edison's inventions was that the Cinematographe could project an image onto a screen, so that a large audience could view the images simultaneously. This took the fledgling motion picture industry out of penny arcades and into auditoriums, creating a new form of mass entertainment. In September 1896, the stage magician Carl Hertz showed projected film at the Tivoli Theatre in Sydney using the Lumiere Cinematographe. The first film made in Australia showed the Melbourne Cup, run in November 1896. It was shot by Marius Sestier on a Cinematographe camera. The producer was the Australian society photographer Walter Barnett.

Early filmmakers saw the new camera purely as a scientific instrument to be used to record real life and events. So for some years motion pictures were simply short documentaries. They were presented as novelty items in vaudeville or variety shows, either in legitimate theatres or in temporary shop fit-outs. But the initial interest flagged after a few years, and by April 1899 the last picture house in Sydney had closed.

The Australian movie industry begins

Interest was renewed in 1905 when two British-born entrepreneurs arrived to mould the fledgling industry - Charles Cozens Spencer (1874-1930) and Thomas James West (1855-1916), usually known as T. J. West. Spencer arrived in Sydney in 1905 after prospecting for gold in Canada in 1892, followed by a stint screening motion pictures there. In Sydney, he opened the Great American Theatrescope at the Lyceum Theatre, turning it into a permanent picture theatre in June 1908. He soon became the leading film exhibitor in the country and moved into film-making, establishing a permanent production unit in 1908. He was an early supporter of the director Raymond Longford, who had great success with *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919) and *On Our Selection* (1920).

Figure 3 Lumiere Cinematographe in projection mode

T.J. West was a theatre entrepreneur who toured with stage companies in the USA, New Zealand and Australia. Arriving in Sydney in 1906, he established West's Pictures in 1908. Over the next few years, this became one of the largest film exhibitors in Australia, eventually branching out into production.

Within a decade, motion pictures developed from the recording of brief everyday events, then to single-reel story films up to 16 minutes long with actors, right up to multi-reel narratives of an hour or more. *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, made in 1906, was the first Australian narrative film more than an hour long, at 1 hour 15 minutes, and the longest film in the world at the time[3]. This was followed by other successes: *Eureka Stockade*, *Robbery under Arms*, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, *The Squatter's Daughter* and *Thunderbolt*[4].

In August 1908, the Bijou Picture Palace in George Street at Railway Square opened as Sydney's first purpose-built picture theatre with a programme consisting of a love story set in Mexico, a history of

the Dreyfus case, and several short films dealing with buck jumping, wood chopping, and comedy subjects[5]. By 1911, cinema had grown to become the most popular entertainment in Sydney, with fourteen known full-time picture theatres in the central business district. In the decade from 1907 to 1917, sixteen cinemas were built, nine of them surviving to the 1960s.

Figure 4 ***The Story of the Kelly Gang*****, 1906**

Going out to the theatre, whether to see a Shakespearean play or a variety show, was always a special occasion. Many theatres were elaborately decorated inside and out, with a proscenium arch and velvet curtains. Early purpose-built cinemas tried to maintain the feeling of a special occasion for moviegoers. Staff wore formal dinner clothes, and the city picture palaces were just as elaborate as traditional theatres. Until the modern era, cinemas were built with traditional features such as the proscenium arch, even though there were no stage actors, and curtains, even though there were no set changes to hide from the audience.

The big difference was that going to the pictures was a fraction of the price of live theatre shows, and in most cinemas it was the same price for all patrons. Up to World War 1, patrons were typically charged 6d for adults and 3d for children[6]. In a few years, there were so many movies coming from the USA that programmes changed every week. Almost half the population went to the movies regularly.

The eastern fringe picture theatres built in the first decade 1907-1917 are (note that * means they operated for less than ten years)[7]:

*1906, Thripelodeon Picture Show, 72 Oxford St
*1910, Empire Picture Palace, 17a Oxford St
1910, Redfern Picture Palace, Lawson Square
1911, (West's) Olympia, Corner Oxford and S. Dowling Sts
*1909, Burlington (Open Air) Theatre, 276 Liverpool St
1912, Coronation Picture Theatre, Cleveland St (at Crown St)
1910, Crown Star No. 2 Picture Theatre, 496 Crown St
*1912, Crown Star No. 1 Picture Theatre, Corner Crown and Foveaux Sts
*1913, Imperial Theatre, 1-19 Yurong St
1916, King's Cross Theatre, Corner Victoria St and Darlinghurst St

Bushranging films dominated the film production market in the first decade of motion pictures. But despite its popularity, this genre was banned in New South Wales (NSW) from 1912 because the films portrayed police in an unsympathetic light[8].

Silent films not so silent

While there was no sound recorded with films until the late 1920s, the early films were not viewed in silence. As well as a commentary, there was always some form of live music accompanying the screen action, from the very early days. A guitarist played at the first public projection of movies by the Lumiere brothers in 1895 in Paris. But the custom of accompanying all exhibitions with an orchestra was started by Edison at Koster and Bial's Music Hall in New York City in 1896[9].

Right from the beginning, music was recognised as essential, contributing to the atmosphere and giving the audience vital emotional clues. But musical accompaniment could be drastically different in scale, depending on the size of the venue. Small town and suburban theatres usually had a pianist. Then, beginning in the mid-1910s, large city theatres tended to have organists or ensembles of musicians. Massive theatre organs were designed to fill a gap between a simple piano player and a larger orchestra. They also had a wide range of special effects. Some theatre organs like the Mighty Wurlitzer, produced from 1914 to 1943, could simulate some orchestral sounds along with a number of percussion effects such as bass drums and cymbals, as well as sound effects such as galloping horses and rolling rain.

Figure 5 Keyboard of the Mighty Wurlitzer theatre organ

Early silent films either used an improvised score or one compiled of classical or popular music. But once full-length features were commonplace, music was compiled from folios of general photoplay music by the cinema's pianist, organist, orchestral conductor, or by the movie studio itself, accompanied by a cue sheet for the film. From 1915, it was relatively common for the biggest-budget films (starting with D W Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915) to arrive at a theatre with original scores specially written for the film, which the local orchestra had to learn and then perform during screenings. The picture theatres in Sydney's eastern fringe typically used an orchestra of four or five players, seated between the front row and the screen.

Early film materials

Nitrate (or nitrocellulose) film base was the first transparent flexible base commercially available, first manufactured by Eastman Kodak in 1889. But nitrate had the major drawback that it was extremely flammable (being virtually the same as guncotton). It decomposed after several decades into an inflammable gas, leaving sticky and goo-like film, which was even more inflammable.

Projection booth fires were not uncommon in the early days of movies if a film was exposed to too much heat while passing through the projector's gate. This typically happened when the projector stalled and the film was stuck in the projection gate. The hot projection lamp then heated up the film to flash point if the projectionist did not switch off the lamp quickly. Several incidents of this type resulted in audience deaths caused by flames, smoke or stampede. The New South Wales Government brought in regulations requiring theatre developers to make the projection box fireproof. A fire would thus result in the incineration of the projectionist only, no doubt a relief to the patrons in the auditorium.

Despite the well-known dangers of nitrate film, it was used in virtually all major movies (which were made with 35mm film) until 1952, when Kodak switched to an improved acetate "safety film". Kodak had been working with acetate film as early as 1909, and it was always used for 8mm and 16mm film

formats, because they were originally meant for home movie use. Acetate film does not burn under intense heat, but rather melts with a bubbly effect.

The talkies arrive

Attempts to create synchronised-sound motion pictures go back to the early Edison lab in 1896. But it was only in the early 1920s that basic technologies were available, such as vacuum tube amplifiers and high-quality loudspeakers. The 1920s saw a race to design and bring to market several sound formats such as Vitaphone (1926), Fox Movietone (1927) and RCA Photophone (1928). The first commercially successful sound film was *The Jazz Singer*, released by Warner Brothers in October 1927. They were the first studio to accept sound as an element in film production and used Vitaphone, a sound-on-disc system.

This method of recording the sound on a separate disc had several advantages: it was generally cheaper than recording sound directly on film, and the phonograph discs had a better dynamic range than most sound-on-film systems of the day. But the sound-on-film system ultimately won out. The advantages were that it was easier to edit films with the sound and picture on the same reel, and the sound could not fall out of synch due to speed changes on the film or the player skipping on the disc. The discs only lasted about twenty screenings and then had to be replaced.

The sound fad of 1927 quickly became standard procedure by 1929 in the United States. But the studios were still not entirely convinced of the talkies' universal appeal, and through 1930 the majority of Hollywood movies were produced in dual versions, silent and talking[10]. In Australia, a sound version of *The Devil's Playground* (1928) was arguably the first Australian talkie[11].

Sound recording technology was problematic in the early days. Cameras were noisy, so had to be covered in sound-dampening casings. Boom microphones were developed that could be held just out of frame and moved with the actors. In 1931, a major improvement in sound fidelity was the development of three-way speaker systems when sound was separated into low, medium and high frequencies and sent to a large bass woofer, and midrange speaker and a high frequency tweeter.

During the silent movie era, films were shot at variable speeds from 12 to 40 frames per second (fps), depending on the year and studio. Because early projectors were hand cranked, the operator could vary the speed. Projectionists often received instructions from the distributors on the musical cue sheet as to how fast particular reels or scenes should be projected[12]. The film might be slowed down for tender or dramatic scenes and sped up for exciting chase scenes. Variable projection speed could be tolerated when there was no sound, but the addition of speech and music meant that a standard speed had to be maintained - otherwise the spoken voice would be very unnatural. 24 fps was the projection speed decided on by 1930, and this is used to this day.

Once Australian picture theatres started converting to sound, talking on film caught the public's imagination, transforming the landscape of popular entertainment. Suburban variety troupes disappeared and the better performers tried to get into the film industry. Theatre companies that specialised in melodrama disappeared, as narrative plays such as mystery thrillers, bedroom comedies and serious drama transferred well to the sound screen and their audiences followed. Stage musicals also translated effortlessly to the screen in spectacles such as the Busby Berkeley film musicals.

But the introduction of talkies to Australia was not without controversy. Many Australians used to British accents and pronunciations were greatly offended by American speech (often called a "twang") during the inter-war period. Not only were many of the talkies considered crude by often portraying gangsters or cowboys, but it was thought that the American voice had a detrimental effect both on the senses and on the spoken word in this country[13].

Sound also had a major impact on the movie industry itself. A number of silent film stars did not successfully make the transition to talkies, such as those with accents or otherwise discordant voices. Those who came to movies from vaudeville or musical theatre generally fared better, as they were accustomed to the demands of both dialogue and song, such as Al Jolson, Jeanette MacDonald and the Marx Brothers[14].

A few actors managed to become major stars in both the silent and sound eras, such as Norma Shearer, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo. An increasing number of movie house orchestras found themselves out of work as talking pictures emerged with pre-recorded musical tracks. The introduction of talking pictures in 1926 removed the remaining chief difference in favour of live performance: spoken dialogue. Within a few years, the half-century tradition of vaudeville was effectively wiped out[15]. Many film historians and fans, both at the time and later, thought that silent film reached an aesthetic peak by the late 1920s and the early years of talkies delivered little that could be compared to the best of the silent films[16].

Television decimates suburban cinema

Cinema audiences dropped steadily after World War II as the cost of living rose, and the production studios struggled. On 16 September 1956, television broadcasting began in Australia, initially having a depressing effect on the already depressed feature film production and exhibition sectors. The impact of television on cinema was similar to the earlier impact of cinema on vaudeville, dealing a heavy blow to the movie industry. Many of the city picture palaces were demolished or converted into multiple screen venues (multiplexes). The Capitol and the State theatres have survived, but both of these are now used for stage performances.

The final body blow to the suburban cinemas that survived television was the popularisation of the Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) from 1975. Despite the format war between Sony's Betamax and VHS VCR system (JVC) systems, the attraction of renting a movie for a few dollars and watching it on the television at home was very popular, as long as you were prepared to wait for its cinema run to end. This was not so different from movie-going in the suburbs in any case, as the cinemas outside the big city majors usually showed second or even third release films.

These post-war ruptures to the suburban cinemas saw the great majority close down completely, or convert their large unfilled auditoriums to multiplexes where small numbers of patrons could choose between three or four films being screened simultaneously. The Olympia Theatre in Paddington is the only example in Sydney's eastern fringe of a purpose-built picture theatre that survived (albeit with periods of closure) from the very early days of movies until the last few years.

Darlinghurst

Australian Picture Palace/Tatler/Park/Paris, 203-207 Liverpool Street

A grand avenue

Bubonic plague arrived at the Sydney docks in Darling Harbour in 1900, infecting over 300 people and causing the death of a third of them. The resulting terror gave a great impetus to the growing movement for slum eradication in the inner city. In August 1900, after the first outbreak, the City Health Officer, Cyril Corlette, proposed a radical new policy of demolition and rehousing in model dwellings. In 1905, the Sydney Municipal Council was granted powers to resume and remodel whole areas for street widening.

However, Lord Mayor Allen Taylor's interpretation of "remodelling" was to demolish houses and replace them with business premises and factories, not new houses. Taylor was a timber tycoon, shipowner and avid slum clearer. In June 1906, the area of Surry Hills around Wexford Street, Exeter Place and Foster Street was compulsorily resumed, with the intention of widening Wexford Street to 100 feet for improved access to the new Central Station. In 1908, the Council extended the resumption area northwards so that the new broad street, named Wentworth Avenue, would meet up with Liverpool Street, at the start of Oxford Street[17].

Walter Burley Griffin designs a theatre

In 1912, the Sydney City Council advertised the sale of long leases in the Wentworth Avenue resumption. In August 1914, the land at Lot 38, 2nd subdivision on the corner of Liverpool Street was leased for fifty years to Australian Picture Palace Ltd. In February 1916, the theatre opened as the Australian Picture Palace with one screen and 915 seats under the management of Walter Brown. Mr. Brown had previously managed a cinema of the same name not far away at 17-19 Oxford Street from October 1912 until August 1915, when it became the Emu Theatre. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described the new building a few days before its opening:

> "it has large and commodious vestibule entrances on both Liverpool Street and Wentworth Avenue. Used in the construction are Australian maple-lined walls, tessellated floors, white marble staircases, Queensland maple and silky oak woodwork, and moulded plaster ceilings. The dress circle is of reinforced concrete throughout, with marble and tiled dados and adjacent to the screen are singing boxes. Externally the building presents a very dignified appearance"[18].

A few days later, *The Mirror of Australia* reported that

> "The fittings are most elaborate, and the system of ventilation is the first of its kind installed in Australia, ensuring a perfectly cool interior on the hottest summer day. A fine organ and piano will supply music during the day, and a full orchestra will be attendance every night. Walter Brown has much experience with picture theatres in the past, and has secured the very best features available, the products of the Metro Pictures Corporation"[19].

It is possible that Burley Griffin designed only the façade and that the building was completed by others. The theatre was a very modest reinforced concrete building with a tall cylindrical corner

element and heavy concrete balconies. The facade was articulated by the relief stucco panelling[20]. In September 1916, the theatre advertised continuous sessions from 11 am.

Figure 6 Paris Theatre advertising *Tom Jones*, 1965

An Art Deco redesign as the Tatler

In October 1935, the manager Errol Syred announced that the theatre would close for renovation, and then reopen as the Tatler Theatre the next month. The *Sydney Morning Herald* commented that this was a "catchy title which should appeal to entertainment lovers"[21]. It was completely refurbished with new plaster decoration throughout the foyer and auditorium. The design by Bruce Dellit was in a jazz-style type of Art Deco ornamentation[22]. The auditorium featured a colour scheme of silver, blue and gold, as well as comfortable Dunlopillo seating[23]. Following its reopening, the theatre showed second and third run films, changing weekly.

In 1943, Warner Brothers and Hoyts could not agree on contract terms and Warners amassed a large stockpile of unreleased films. Then a company known as Austral American Productions came to an exclusive arrangement with Warner Brothers to release their films[24]. In July 1943, this company took over the lease of the Tatler Theatre. Its opening offering was *They Died with their Boots On*, starring Errol Flynn, but with patronage declining, the Tatler returned to the weekly-change rerun policy in August 1946[25].

Live theatre after World War II

This policy lasted until November 1949, when constant arguments with the major distributors caused the current lessee, Roy Darling, to terminate film screening altogether and start a weekly-change programme of live revue acts on stage[26].

Cinema audiences fell after World War II as the cost of living rose around the world. The main British film producer, the Rank Organisation, announced a loss of over £3.5 million for 1949, and was closing almost all of its production studios. Even the big Hollywood studios had made drastic

economies in the previous two years. Mr. Darling said his theatre took an average of £2,000 a week four years ago, but only £150 in one week not long before the recent changeover to live revue[27]. Two shows a day, at 3pm and 8pm, featured tap dancers, ventriloquists, fan dancers, strip-tease artists, Chinese magic acts, vocalists, balancing acts, contortionists and jugglers, all with the added attraction of the Charlie Steel Orchestra and ballet girls known as the Tatler Lovelies[28].

In 1942, the Federal Government brought in the Entertainments Tax Act. This was a controversial impost that added up to 30% to the cost of adult cinema tickets by 1948[29], although live theatrical entertainments paid 25% less than film screenings[30]. In early 1950, Roy Darling, desperate to keep his theatre afloat in the face of rising costs, falling revenue and high taxes, announced that he would be keeping ticket prices the same, but instead of forwarding the entertainment tax to the Taxation Department, would put this into the theatre's general revenue. In the same breath, he declared that he was suing the Commonwealth of Australia to declare the Entertainments Tax Act of 1942 and Amendments of 1944 and 1946 to be null and void[31].

Mr. Darling soon courted further controversy by making it known that he wanted the Tatler Theatre converted into a four-storey luxury nightclub by an American syndicate, at a cost of $1,000,000. It would be modelled on New York clubs, and the State Government was expected to give special permission for the release of building materials. This prompted the NSW Teachers' Federation to complain that there was a dire shortage of school buildings for the growing post-war baby boomers and children should be treated at least as well as the patrons of hotels and night clubs[32]. In addition, the Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU) announced it would strongly resist the plan. "Dollars are scarce and there are far better uses for the few dollars we have than wasting them on the pleasures of night club and café society idlers", thundered a BWIU spokesman[33].

Darling was fined a total of £120 on three charges of failure to pay entertainment tax in March[34]. He was also fined £200 for not paying tax on his employees' wages. After pleading guilty, he told the court that he had lost £7,000 during the last nine months, but was soon to produce a stage play, which he expected would be a financial success[35].

Rusty Bugles play a controversial tune

The weekly change of revue continued until April 1950, when an extended season of the play *Rusty Bugles* was planned. Sadly for the hapless Mr. Darling, this was a poor choice of play to resurrect his fortunes: written by Sumner Locke Elliot in 1948, it depicted the life of very bored soldiers in a Northern Territory army camp. It had a long run at the King's Theatre in Melbourne, and received good publicity from a censorship stir: the producers were forced by the Victorian Chief Secretary to replace many of the seventeen uses of "bloody" in the first act with "ruddy", a less offensive term. But the offending adjectives gradually reappeared as the 20 week run continued[36].

In Sydney, the NSW Chief Secretary took his southern colleague's lead by also requesting that the offending sanguinary adjectives be toned down or cut out altogether. In the end, the play ran for only a couple of weeks before Roy Darling decided to cancel the run, declaring that it was not up to the standard demanded by Sydney audiences[37].

Undaunted, the next month Mr. Darling decided to present a succession of intimate vaudeville shows, even though the theatre's small stage and limited equipment presented problems for producers[38]. This soon got him into further trouble with Claude Matthews, the difficult-to-please

Chief Secretary, who said the current production was in defiance of the law because the temporary A-class licence issued some months ago to allow stage productions was on the understanding that alterations would be made in the interests of safety. The theatre was built as a picture theatre (and was originally given a B-class licence for this purpose) and did not have a wide enough stage or the backstage facilities required by live performers[39].

Don't mess with the taxman

The final ignominy for Roy Darling was that in August he was declared bankrupt owing £1,811 in unpaid entertainment tax[40] and a few days later was sentenced to twelve months' gaol for failing to pay tax instalments deducted from employees' wages. He had gambled on the financial success of *Rusty Bugles* in order to pay the taxes and lost heavily[41]. Still unable to find an audience, the Tatler closed its doors in September 1950[42].

Hoyts returns to films as the Paris Theatre

In January 1951, the Sydney Council advertised an auction sale of the remaining 13.5 years of the lease on the property[43]. Hoyts Theatres Limited took up the lease and, after some renovation, reopened in September 1951 as the Park Theatre[44].

Then in 1954, seeing the rising popularity of "art" films, Hoyts decided to change the name to the Paris Theatre and run it solely for Continental films[45]. The gala premiere of the French film *Edouard et Caroline* in September 1954 introduced "Sydney's new intimate theatre, which aims to provide film presentation with a Continental accent, as well as Continental films". Hoyts aimed to cater for a fast-growing audience which welcomed different stars and production techniques. The Curzon in Mayfair and the Normandie in New York were outstanding examples of these intimate theatres, and the policy and amenities of the Paris were patterned on them. As a final touch, instead of the usual lollies and chocolates at interval (including the famous Jaffas), patrons could indulge in the novelty of café noire and French confectionery from the boutique shop[46].

But the continental film policy only lasted a few years, and Hoyts' next policy change was to screen semi-blockbuster films with long runs, such as the multiple Oscar-winning films *Around the World in Eighty Days* (shown in 1957) and *Tom Jones* (shown in 1965)[47]. The former ran for two years and three months at the Paris[48]. In 1957, Hoyts modernised the theatre for 70 mm widescreen projection of Todd-AO and new sound equipment, but the small screen was not ideal for this format.

In 1968, Sydney Council decided to call for tenders for a 50-year lease or the freehold purchase. This alarmed Hoyts management, who had assumed that the five-year lease they signed in 1964 would be extended in 1969. Hoyts pointed out to Council how much money they had poured into modernising the cinema operation, and requested a guarantee that the new owner would not terminate their lease, as they feared. Eventually, Hoyts' lease was extended in 1969 and Council lost interest in selling the land for the time being[49].

But the Paris Theatre was still not safe, and in 1970 the estate agent L. J. Hooker wrote to Council saying all owners in the same city block were interested in selling, and they would like the Paris Theatre included in that, so the whole block could be redeveloped. Then in 1973, the Council listed the Paris Theatre for sale to help finance the construction of Town Hall House[50]. Finally, in 1977, after the creation of its mega-cinema complex in George Street, Hoyts abandoned the Paris. This was a sign that the days of small cinema in Sydney were almost over[51].

Experimental theatre and rock music

In 1978, the Paris became the home of the Paris Theatre Company, a short-lived experimental theatre group set up by Jim Sharman and Rex Cramphorn with financial assistance from the author Patrick White. Founded in March 1978 in response to the cancellation of the Old Tote's season of contemporary plays at the Seymour Theatre, it aimed to present new Australian work on a major scale. The new company drew together some of the biggest names in Sydney theatre, such as Robyn Nevin, Kate Fitzpatrick, Jim Sharman and Bryan Brown[52].

The Paris Theatre was the site of other radical activities when, in May 1978, 900 people attended a gay film festival there, a month before Sydney's first Gay Mardi Gras burst upon the city. Then in August 1978, the new Louis Nowra play, *Visions,* opened. The Paris Theatre Company brought a new generation of theatre artists to the fore, paving the way for the Sydney Theatre Company. But the company lasted less than one season, folding even before its final production opened, Patrick White's *A Cheery Soul*. This play was transferred to the newly created Sydney Theatre Company[53].

Between Hoyts' departure in 1977 and the Paris Theatre Company's first production the next year, the theatre hosted a number of rock music concerts. Notable performers in 1977 were Rose Tattoo, Cold Chisel and Icehouse. The last known concert was by INXS in December 1980[54]. The building was finally pulled down in 1981 to make way for the towering apartment block known as the Connaught fronting Liverpool Street, and the Y Hotel Hyde Park fronting Wentworth Avenue, operated by the Young Women's Christian Association.

For most of its life, the Paris was a fringe city theatre, but its simple interior was more in the style of a suburban cinema. It was probably the local movie house for the former large population of terrace house dwellers in East Sydney[55]. The theatre had a long and varied history, being home to movies, vaudeville, cabaret, revues, drama and rock music. Its chequered history gives an insight into the ups and downs of theatre and cinema life in Sydney through the twentieth century[56].

Burlington Picture Theatre, 276 Liverpool Street

Burdekin's Paddock

Darlinghurst Public School first opened in a temporary building in a former cow paddock on the north-east corner of Liverpool and Forbes Streets[57]. Then in January 1884, the school moved to a permanent site bounded by Liverpool, Womerah and Barcom Streets[58]. The site, known as Burdekin's Paddock, was occasionally used for entertainments such as merry-go-rounds and tightrope walkers[59]. For example, in January 1887, the aerial high wire and trapeze artist Mr. Alexander exhibited his tight-rope abilities there[60].

Not in our cow paddock

In September 1909, Joseph Solomon and Charles Baker applied for a licence to erect and run an open-air picture show in a temporary structure in Burdekin's Paddock. But the proposal was unpopular with the many of the local residents, who sent petitions to the Sydney City Council and the Chief Secretary voicing their displeasure. They claimed the picture show would be a nuisance and would interfere with the quietness of their area, also that "the entertainment will attract an undesirable class of persons to the streets adjoining Burdekin's Paddock"[61].

But in a move that was not unusual for the time, the entrepreneurial Solomon and Baker did not wait for permission to proceed: they started erecting the picture theatre while the Council and Chief Secretary debated the pros and cons of the application. Solomon and Baker wrote to the Council stating that they had paid for and received a licence at the Chief Secretary's office in August 1909, and were told that they did not need to trouble the Council with the matter and could proceed with building. They claimed that their proposed picture show would be quiet and orderly with no brass band or drums, simply a small stringed band. They intended the entertainment to be a "refined and decorous one suitable to the locality". They pointed to similar entertainments in other parts of the city and suburbs which have been a "source of innocent amusement and entertainment, especially to the poorer classes in the locality".

The two entrepreneurs appealed to Daniel Levy, the local Member in the Legislative Assembly, who wrote to the Lord Mayor arguing that an injustice had been done to the applicants by delaying the venture. They were ready to commence their entertainment, had incurred heavy debts and were blocked from proceeding for no clear reason. The Council finally granted Solomon and Baker a licence in December 1909[62]. The theatre closed for renovations in 1910, reopening in September under the new management of Jack Gavin. As well as screening movies, illustrated songs were performed by Bert Morrison with full orchestral effects[63].

For the winter of 1911, the Burlington was fitted with a canvas covering for the greater comfort of patrons on cold nights. However, the Council was against such temporary coverings, as they were a fire hazard, and demanded that the management remove the cover. By this time, the theatre was owned by Jessie Edgecombe, widow of Alfred Edgecombe who died in April 1911. In September, the Town Clerk ordered Mrs. Edgecombe to remove the cover, writing that as it was the end of winter, there would be no hardship ensuing[64]. Then in March 1912, with another winter approaching, Mrs. Edgecombe was given approval to erect a strongly-constructed iron roof over part of the seating.

Still no more select than heretofore

In 1913, the owners were given notice to quit the site, and they apparently dismantled the theatre in order to move it to another location. The new manager, Mr. C. W. Webb, applied to Council to erect a tent on the site to continue showing movies. This prompted another spate of petitions and letters from residents objecting to another temporary structure on the site. The residents "would like the locality kept more select than heretofore". The new management, like their predecessors, did not wait around for approval but erected a tent and started screening films. The Town Clerk notified Mr. Webb that Council did not approve the temporary structure[65].

Figure 7 First Church of Christ Scientist, Darlinghurst

The Burlington continued operating despite the disapproval of the Council, and in May 1914 the theatre advertised that they had a few vacancies for pupils wanting to acquire the profession of Biograph Operator, with a guarantee of proficiency after one month's tuition[66]. But by 1915, the theatre was nearing the end of its life, and in July the owners advertised the sale of the plant and structures: extensive galvanised iron hoarding, an open shed covered with galvanised iron, and complete cinematograph plant and fireproof building[67]. After this, the site remained vacant until April 1923, when the land was purchased by the First Church of Christ Scientist for £9,000. An impressive church was constructed in 1926-1927 in the Classical Inter-War Beaux Arts style[68].

The Burlington suffered from a lack of stable management and the animosity of the nearby residents during its short life. From the experience of other temporary picture theatres in the first era of motion pictures, the Council would have strongly encouraged the management to erect a more substantial (and expensive) building in a few years' time, when movies were seen as an established form of mass entertainment rather than just a novelty. Perhaps the Burlington owners were not prepared to take that step.

Empire/Australian/Emu/Trudamite/Gaiety, 17a Oxford Street

Mark Foy starts an empire in Sydney

Mark Foy senior (1830-1884) was an Irish immigrant who established drapery stores in Victoria, first in Bendigo then in Collingwood, Melbourne. After his death, his eldest son Francis (c1856-1918) moved to Sydney in 1884 and established a store in Oxford Street with his younger brother Mark (1865-1950), naming it after their father.

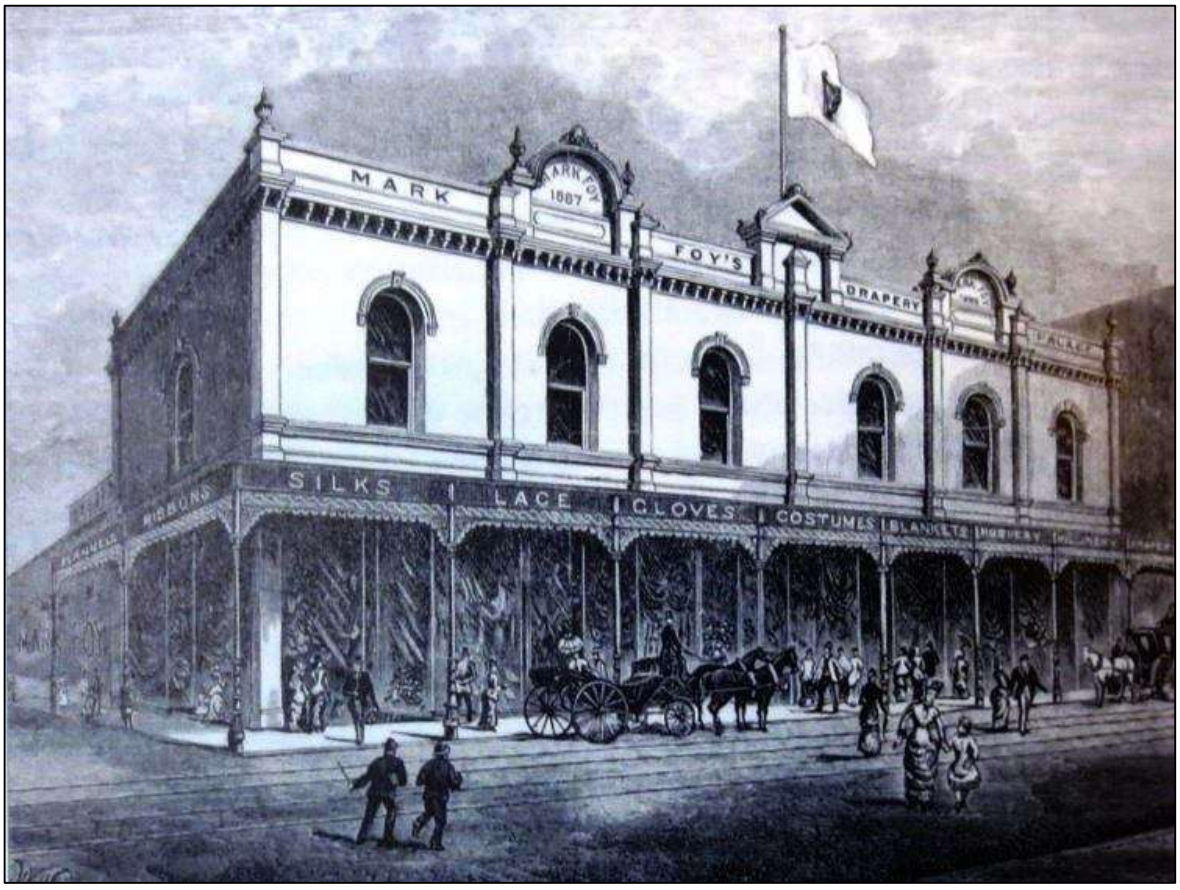


Figure 8 Mark Foy's building, *Illustrated Sydney News*, 1887

The store was extended two years later, and additional premises were purchased in 1894, extending the business to the Brisbane Street corner and occupying numbers 9 to 19 Oxford Street. With business flourishing, the ambitious Foy family wanted to move on to bigger things, so in 1909 they opened a massive new store on the corner of Liverpool, Castlereagh and Elizabeth Streets, one of the largest in Sydney at the time. It was known as The Piazza, and was partly modelled on the grand Bon Marche department store in Paris[69]. Its piazza, chandeliers, marble and sumptuous ballroom made it a Sydney institution and one of the country's foremost fashion stores. The store introduced Sydney's first escalator and motor delivery service. In 1985, the building was converted by the New South Wales Government to the Downing Centre courthouse.

One empire becomes another

In May 1910, the Empire Picture Palace opened at 17 Oxford Street in part of the former Mark Foy's building, under the management of William Bevan. The building was a large one, with good seating,

and the management promised the best of pictures, with illustrated songs and a select orchestra[70]. In April 1911, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the Empire

> "put on more than the usual series of moving pictures. There were illustrated songs by Horace Steward, and weight-lifting and ju-jitsu exhibitions by Mounier and Franz. There were also many interesting pictures, both grave and gay"[71].

In October 1912, the name was changed to the Australian Picture Palace, and a programme of continuous pictures was introduced, such as *A Conspiracy against Murat*, *The Franco-Prussian War* (historical), *The Invisible Cyclist*, and *Love Unconquerable* which were well attended[72]. The renovated theatre featured new electric fans, new opera chairs, new decorations, and new fittings throughout, although prices were still 6d and 3d. In April 1914, the theatre was advertised for sale as the only continuous picture show in the locality[73]. Then in March 1915, a fire late at night caused considerable damage before the flames were subdued[74].

Despite this setback, the theatre reopened in August 1915 as the Emu Theatre, screening the first instalment of *The Perils of Pauline*, a damsel-in-distress serial that kept audiences enthralled over twenty episodes as the eponymous heroine was extricated from life-threatening adventures in the nick of time at the end of each episode[75]. In a sign of things to come, in January 1917 the Emu Theatre became a vaudeville house for a time, under the management of William Gough[76]. But by March 1918, the name had changed to the Trudamite Theatre, managed by (the presumably eponymous) Mr. N. Truda, and was once again showing moving pictures. An early attraction was *The Little American* ("The most enthralling Great War drama") with America's Sweetheart Mary Pickford[77].

Harry Sadler brings vaudeville to the Gaiety

Born in about 1878, Harry Sadler was one of the most enigmatic vaudeville performers of the early twentieth century. Pocket-sized, energetic, feisty and a hustler, he probably came closer than any other locally-born performer/manager in matching the great Harry Clay's record of achievement as a vaudeville showman. With a number of variety troupes already under his management around the country, in early 1918 he decided to expand to Perth, opening in April at the Melrose Theatre. However, the success of the Perth venture was clouded by a court case based on Sadler's libellous accusations of an affair between the star Phyllis Faye and the producer Arthur Morley[78].

After losing the case, Sadler returned to Sydney and tried to put his career back on track by taking over the lease of Trudamite Theatre. After renaming the theatre the Gaiety, its fifth and final name, he and producer Andy Kerr opened in December 1918 with a troupe of high profile variety stars. The theatre did "remarkably good business", according to the *Theatre* magazine[79]. But despite this success, Sadler suffered from increasing depression following the disastrous experience in Perth, and in July 1919 he jumped to his death from a railway bridge at Leichhardt[80].

Harry Clay and amateur night

Following Sadler's death, Harry Clay was brought in by Andy Kerr to run the entertainment side of the business. In reality, Kerr had informally asked Clay to provide acts for the Gaiety from early 1919 as Sadler became less reliable. Harry Clay formally took over operations in October 1919, and while he was mainly based at the Bridge Theatre in Newtown, the Gaiety remained one of his company's key theatres through the 1920s[81].

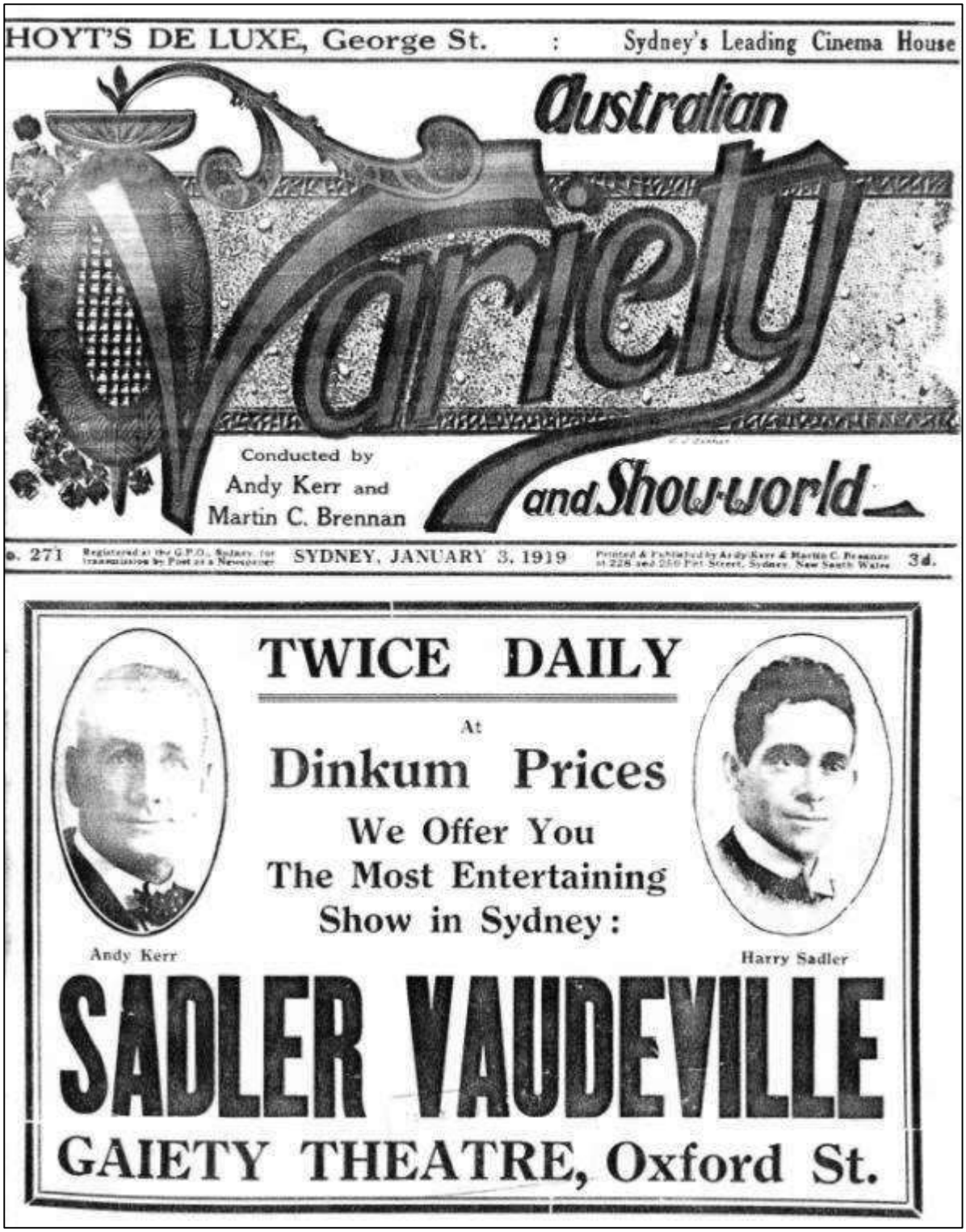


Figure 9 Ad for Sadler's Gaiety Theatre, *Australian Variety*, 1919

A popular attraction at the Gaiety during the 1920s was the amateur night, generally held on Fridays. Some of the acts were dreadful, and the audiences had full rein to voice their displeasure. But any performer who passed the ordeal was ready for a run on Clay's circuit[82]. Harry Clay continued to run the Gaiety right through the 1920s, but when the new-fangled talkies arrived in Sydney in 1929, legitimate theatre folded up very quickly, and Clay's empire crumbled with it[83].

The cast goes down fighting

As the end drew near, the entire cast of the theatre were handed dismissal notices after a performance of *Hawaiian Nights* on 14 November 1931. This was in the depths of the Great Depression when unemployment was very high right across the workforce. In desperation, the actors decided to besiege the rear part of the theatre in protest, claiming that the show was doing moderately well, and bringing in more revenue to the theatre than in the past six months[84]. But the theatre owner claimed he wanted to discontinue the show as it had been unprofitable. After a few days, security men entered the theatre and tried to drive the ten actors out of the theatre. Eventually a fire hose was brought in to end the affray and drenched the building and all those inside. When several constables arrived, the actors departed without further trouble[85].

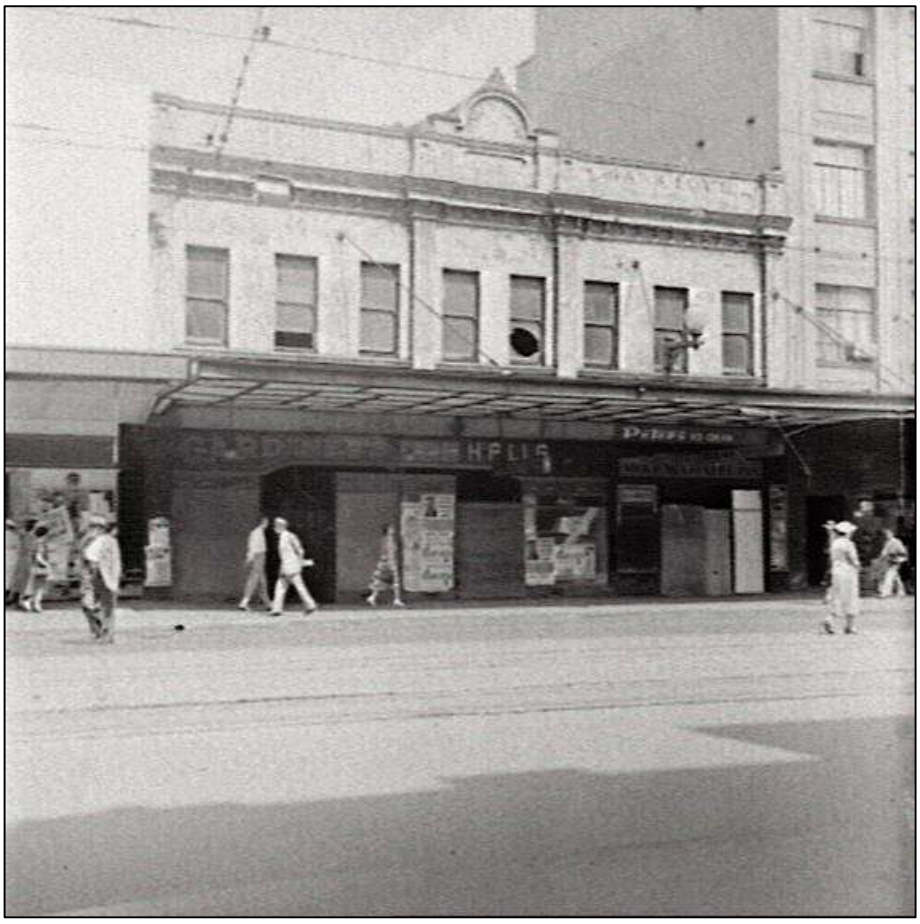


Figure 10 Gaiety Milk bar, 1957

The Gaiety becomes a supermarket

The Gaiety was closed not long after the actors' siege in November 1931 and the building was leased by the supermarket giant G. J. Coles Ltd, who auctioned the scenery, seating and accessories[86]. A Coles' supermarket was constructed at 17-19 Oxford Street, extending to Brisbane Street.

The only reminder of the Gaiety Theatre after its closure was the Gaiety Milk Bar at 13 Oxford Street which achieved fame in the 1950s as the entrance to a large auditorium behind the milk bar that featured jitterbug, jazz and swing music. Today the entire block between Wentworth Avenue and Brisbane Street is occupied by a 23-storey office building called 1 Oxford Street, and a Priceline Pharmacy is located on the site of the old Gaiety Theatre.

The theatre that began in 1910 as the Empire Picture Palace and ended in 1931 as the vaudeville-playing Gaiety Theatre was a classic example of the struggle between traditional live entertainment and the new world of motion pictures that threatened to overwhelm legitimate theatre. When sound was finally introduced to movies at the end of the 1920s, the lure of talkies became irresistible, and vaudeville companies could not compete.

Filmmakers' Cinema, St Peter's Lane

The New Theatre moves to Darlinghurst

The New Theatre was founded in Sydney in 1932 as an independent theatre company, initially operating at the Sydney Workers' Art Club at 233 Pitt Street. In early 1964, the theatre moved to renovated premises at 151 William Street with 114 seats. The renovation work was mainly carried out by volunteers, and the entrance was via the rear of the building in St Peter's Lane. The auditorium was on the first floor, with dressing rooms and a rehearsal space on the top floor. The New Theatre operated from this location until March 1973, when it moved to larger premises in King Street Newtown, in order to expand into major productions, workshop acting classes and children's theatre.

Ubu Films starts experimental cinema

Emerging from the restrictive conservatism of the post-war period, Sydney's vibrant underground culture of the 1960s would provide the impetus for creative experiment. In 1965, an experimental filmmaking collective named Ubu Films was formed at Sydney University by Albie Thoms, David Perry, Aggy Read and John Clark. Others involved in the group were Peter Weir, Phillip Noyce and Bruce Beresford. Ubu Films operated for five years, and exemplified a brief period of unbridled experimentation that flourished until the arts came under institutional control from 1970.

The Sydney Filmmakers' Cooperative was formed in 1966 and legally registered in 1970, with funding from the Experimental Film and Television Fund (EFTF). The EFTF began operation in July 1970 and was designed to support original and innovative work and inexperienced filmmakers who showed promise. Money sourced from the Australian Council for the Arts and administered by the Australian Film Institute was loaned to 73 successful applicants[87]. Many of Ubu's members and activities continued under the aegis of the new cooperative, including the director Albie Thoms.

Experimental cinema finds a co-operative home

The Co-op said in a statement in March 1973 that

> "The cinema will be a showcase for Australian films which are and have been denied screen time by overseas-controlled distribution and exhibition monopolies. The Government's action is a much-needed change in attitude in its arts policy as to date, Government funds have been directed at film production and to a lesser extent distribution, not exhibition"[88].

Albie Thoms said that that majority of the films to be shown were Australian, and ten percent were financed by the Government from the EFTF. He said the grant would give them the chance to show all the films that are being made. The greatest deficiency in the Government's support of film making until then was that they enabled them to be made but not shown[89].

When the New Theatre left the St Peter's Lane premises, the Sydney Filmmakers' Cooperative Ltd occupied the first and second floors to screen 16mm films. So after years of screenings at unlicensed venues, the Co-op had found a permanent home. By then there were 200 members, and 130 films were being held, ready for distribution. Screening commenced in May 1973. There were 8pm screenings Tuesday-Saturday with a 5:30pm show on Saturday and late screenings at 11pm Friday and Saturday. Sunday nights were reserved for previews of new works, works in progress and programmes from visiting film makers. There were also film workshops for beginners[90].

The Co-op never had much money, and one of the problems with running a shoestring operation emerged a few months after opening: the New Theatre directors decided they needed the existing seating for their own use, so the Co-op had to quickly replace the seats at minimum cost. They found a good type of seating at a bargain price, but only 74 of them, so they had to notify the Chief Secretary's office of the reduced seating arrangement[91].

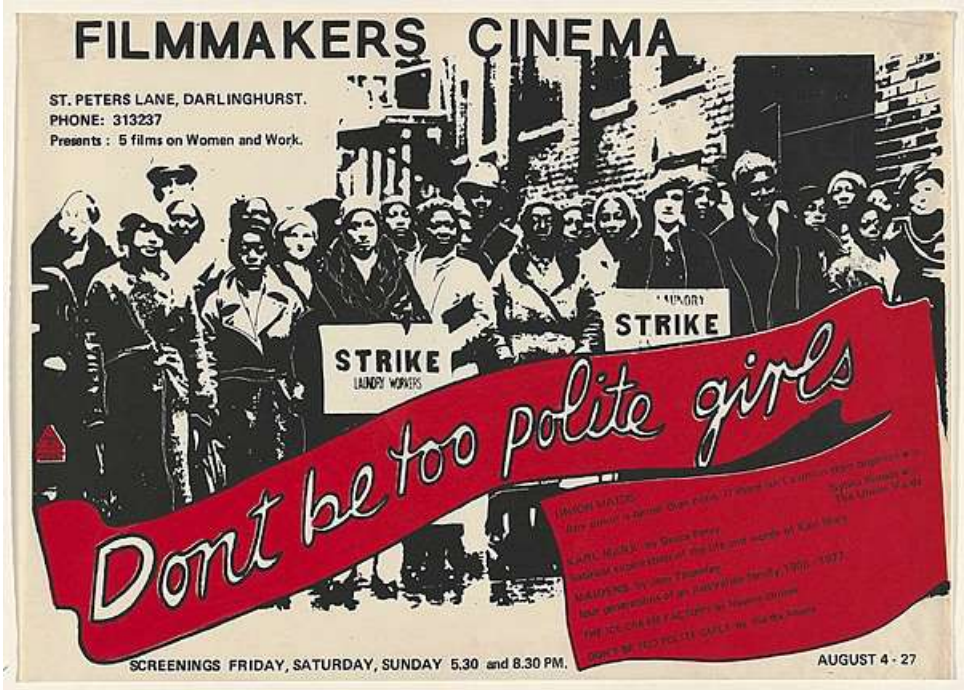


Figure 11 Filmmakers' Cinema, 1978

Never enough funding

The Co-op was totally dependent on government funding to survive, and by 1976 was having difficulty stretching the funds to the end of the year. In November the cinema closed for the rest of the year, announcing that the Federal Government had been granting them $60,000 a year to show and distribute films, but it really needed $90,000 to keep the cinema open all year. So until the next grant arrived in the New Year, the cinema would remain closed. Many Australian-made films would not be shown, and the full-time cinema manager and three part-time projectionists would be out of a job.

Albie Thoms said Peter Weir, Tim Burstall and Michael Thornhill were three directors who would not have been successful later if their early films had not been shown at the cinema. He said that at the time there was no-one else showing Australian films, and that filmmakers had to get some feedback to develop their work[92]. The cinema continued in a difficult financial situation, but correspondence with the Chief Secretary's office showed that they were unable to complete maintenance work requested by the government[93].

In 1980, the Co-op told the Department of Services that it intended to separate its two functions in the future: the leasing out of films and the cinema section. There was a plan to move the cinema to an old silent movie theatre at 84 Glebe Point Road (currently the Glebe Youth Service), keeping the

leasing section in Darlinghurst[94]. The cinema ceased the public screening of films in May 1981, when the Australian Film Commission decided to stop funding the Co-op. Limited screenings were still held, including two for women only in 1982[95].

No funding finally closes the Co-op

In 1985, the Filmmakers Cooperative moved to 179 Harris Street Pyrmont, but did not conduct public screenings. There was a small room for screenings for potential purchasers of films[96]. The Co-op was initially funded in the new location by the AFC, but the AFC encouraged more aggressive marketing and distribution policies, and the Co-op did not have enough resources for this. The Co-op closed its doors for the last time in February 1986 when the AFC decided to direct all of its funding to one body, the Australian Film Institute. The Filmmakers Cooperative operated for less than ten years at the Darlinghurst venue, but in that time it made a significant contribution to the great resurgence of the Australian film industry in the 1970s.

Govinda's Cinema and Restaurant, 112 Darlinghurst Road

Movies in a Hindu temple

Govinda's is a vegetarian restaurant and arthouse movie theatre offering an international buffet followed by a movie in the upstairs boutique cinema. The cinema seats 120, and was opened around 1990[97]. It is a former Hare Krishna temple, now privately-owned but still espousing Krishna principles. The cinema's name comes from one of the many names of the Hindu deity Krishna.

The options for patrons are dinner only, movie only or dinner and movie, with different prices for each. The seating includes custom-made full-length cushions to allow patrons to kick off their shoes and stretch out in comfort. Upright seating is also available in the form of couches and tub chairs[98]. The single-screen cinema screens two to four films per night, five days a week.

Figure 12 Govinda's Cinema patrons relax in style

Imperial Picture Theatre, 1-19 Yurong Street

A most irregular piece of land

In 1793, the Commissary-General John Palmer (1760-1833) was granted 100 acres that he called Woolloomooloo Farm, to run cattle and plant an extensive orchard for the fledgling colony. In 1807, the ex-convict surveyor James Meehan (1774-1806) prepared a plan of the town of Sydney, documenting the existing buildings and farm boundaries. Part of this plan is a line drawn from the western side of Woolloomooloo Bay, following the present Sir John Young Crescent crossing William Street at an angle to Yurong Street, continuing to the south-east corner of Hyde Park (at the present Whitlam Square) and beyond. It is denoted "Mr. Palmer's ditch, which is his present Boundary for Walloomooloo (sic) and other Farms"[99].

This grant boundary, which cuts across all the streets east of Hyde Park at an angle, was still determining property boundaries almost 150 years later, as the 1950 Civic Survey map of Woolloomooloo shows. In particular, the city block containing the Sydney Museum, the William Street Superior Public School and the Sydney Boys' Grammar School are all located to the west of the line, and the triangular block to the east, running to Yurong Street, is empty[100]. This triangle eventually held the Imperial Picture Theatre.

Figure 13 Triangular site of the Imperial Picture Theatre

Imperial skating, pictures and dancing

Yurong Street was named after Yurong Creek, located to the east and running towards Woolloomooloo Bay. In the early 1900s, *Sands Directories* show a number of houses and shops in this street between William Street and Stanley Street[101]. By 1912, these buildings had been demolished and replaced by the Imperial Skating Rink, which opened in April, 1912. The floor was Canadian maple, and the manager was the former skater James C. Bendrodt[102]. The *Evening News* called it "a big structure, on a most irregular piece of land"[103].

The skating venture was doing well, and numbers were increasing the following year[104]. But by September 1913, the management had changed, and the new managers must have decided that the increasing popularity of moving pictures had a better future than roller skating, however successful it was at the time. In September 1913, it was announced that the Imperial Skating Rink would be converted to the Imperial Picture Theatre, at a cost of over £3,000[105].

Pictures were first screened in October 1913. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that "its airy spaciousness and unusually good orchestra ought to ensure its unqualified success. The comfortable seats and refreshment buffet will be appreciated by audiences. Tonight is a film adaptation of Tolstoy's great book *The Living Corpse"*[106].

Sir Joseph Carruthers (politician and former premier of NSW) was the managing director. He said that the distance from the lantern to the screen was over 200 feet. This was the longest projection in any picture theatre in the Southern Hemisphere. Previously the record was 175 feet. As a result, the management hoped to screen pictures equal or superior to anything in Australia. The intention was to show scenic and educational films, as he was a firm believer in moving pictures as a medium of educating the people[107].

In December 1913, the Fraser Film Release and Photographic Co. Ltd took over the lease[108]. This company mainly screened their own films, such as the moral tale *The Money God, or Do Riches Bring Happiness?*[109]. However, the switch to films lasted only four months, and in March 1914 it was reported that the Imperial Picture Theatre would be converted to a palatial dancing academy, to be known as the Imperial Salon de Luxe. James Bendrodt was still the manager. The Maxixe (the Brazilian Tango, precursor to the samba and lambada), the Hesitation Waltz, the Turkey Trot, the Tango, and the latest Parisian dance adaptations would be featured[110].

But the theatre wasn't finished with movies, as shown by newspaper advertisements until September 1914, which mentioned films at the Imperial Theatre at 8pm, and dancing at the Imperial Salon de Luxe from 3pm to 11pm. Presumably these activities were on different nights of the week[111]. The Salon de Luxe continued until 1915, and then changed its operation slightly to a dance hall and cabaret known as the Palladium. It was by then operated by Mr. T. Eslick and based on Continental and American models[112]. The Palladium was still operating in January 1918, but by late in 1918 it had been converted to the Paige Motor Garage.

So ended the short but varied career of this triangular site near William Street as a place of public amusement. Its history probably reflects the changing and competing nature of entertainment at the time, as well as problems with the theatre's location: it was not quite a city venue, and not quite a suburban one.

Thripelodeon Amusement Parlour, 72 Oxford Street

Shopping in the high street

Numbers 72-74 on the north side of Oxford Street Darlinghurst were constructed in the 1850s as shops with residences above. From 1863, John Peel owned both buildings and by 1894 he had sold them to F. B. Williams, co-owner of Williams and Gibbons, grocers and tea merchants[113]. From 1904, H. G. Levy & Company operated a furniture warehouse from both buildings[114], which were still owned by the Williams family.

Figure 14 The Thripelodeon as a billiard saloon (left), 1910

Travelogues for shoppers

In December 1906, the Australian Amusements Company converted the buildings to a small picture theatre and started screening short travel documentaries, calling the venue the Thripelodeon Amusement Parlour. They also operated a similar picture theatre called Central Station at 176 Pitt Street (adjacent to the Arcadia Hotel). *A Trip to Canada in an Observation Car* was played at Pitt Street, and a "realistic and instructive transcontinental ride" played at the Thripelodeon. Continuous daily and evening performances operated every half hour in the "beautifully fitted little theatre, at a cost of 3d"[115].

The *Herald* reported in January 1907 that "hundreds of shoppers dropped in daily in the busy thoroughfare to spend an interesting twenty minutes"[116]. This theatre's programme was aimed at shoppers in the high streets to give them a welcome break from the rigours of shopping. The origin of the name Thripelodeon is a mystery, but an Odeon in ancient Greece was a place for musical entertainment and poetry recitals.

The Thripelodeon only operated for six months, and the last advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was in July 1907[117]. By 1908, the Australian Amusements Company had moved to the Sydney Showground and was operating an outdoor event called the *World's Touring Cars (railway illusion)* show[118].

A wider high street

After the Tripelodeon closed in July 1907, the building returned to retail use for a few years: a grocery store operated until September 1908[119], then a hairdressing salon[120]. Finally, Frederick Saidy established a billiard saloon in 72-74 Oxford Street.

But commercial activity in the building was going to be short-lived, because in 1906 the Sydney City Council announced its intention of demolishing all the buildings on the northern side of Oxford Street from Liverpool Street to Bourke Street in order to widen the street from 66 feet to 100 feet[121]. The resumption of the north side buildings was gazetted in June 1909, and from this date the owners were paid compensation and the Council took ownership of the properties. The project took place in five stages between 1910 and 1914. Frederick Saidy was running the Oxford Billiard Saloon when 72-74 Oxford St was demolished in 1910 or 1911. He received £1,000 compensation for the curtailment of his 10 year lease[122].

King's Cross

King's Cross Theatre, corner Darlinghurst Road & Victoria Street

A grand picture theatre on Mark Foy's land

The large triangular block on the south side of the intersection of Darlinghurst Road and Victoria Street, King's Cross, was occupied by an old cottage and part-owned by Mark Foy, the department store magnate. Foy was approached by Frank Waddington with the idea of building a picture theatre on the site. Waddington was one of the pioneers of the motion picture industry in Australia. In July 1915, Mark Foy and A. Jerome submitted plans to Council to build a large picture theatre. The owners planned a handsome and impressive structure that would be a powerful attraction for residents throughout the eastern suburbs[123]. The entrance to the marble vestibule would be in Darlinghurst Road. It was opened in April 1916 by Waddington Pictures Ltd, with seating for over 2,000 patrons.

Figure 15 King's Cross Theatre

The premiere created tremendous public interest. No expense had been spared to make it one of the best appointed theatres in Australia. By this time, Frank Waddington operated several other large theatres in central Sydney: the Globe Theatre in George Street, the Grand Theatre in Pitt Street (opposite Royal Arcade), the Strand Theatre in Pitt Street (opposite Farmer's), the Majestic Theatre at Hyde Park, and soon afterwards the Glaciarium was taken over from T. J. West.

Radio broadcasts on Sunday

In 1925, the King's Cross Investment Company raised £100,000 of capital to acquire the King's Cross Theatre and the adjoining shops[124]. When radio broadcasting began in Sydney in 1924, some theatres saw an opportunity in the new medium, especially on Sundays when no movies were screened. The King's Cross Theatre broadcast orchestral music on station 2FC for the first time in December 1926[125]. After this, the theatre broadcast sacred concerts on Sunday nights on radio[126].

But the ambitious project to construct such a large and luxurious theatre did not meet with the financial success that its promoters hoped for. In June 1928, the theatre closed for a complete interior renovation, reopening in August that year.

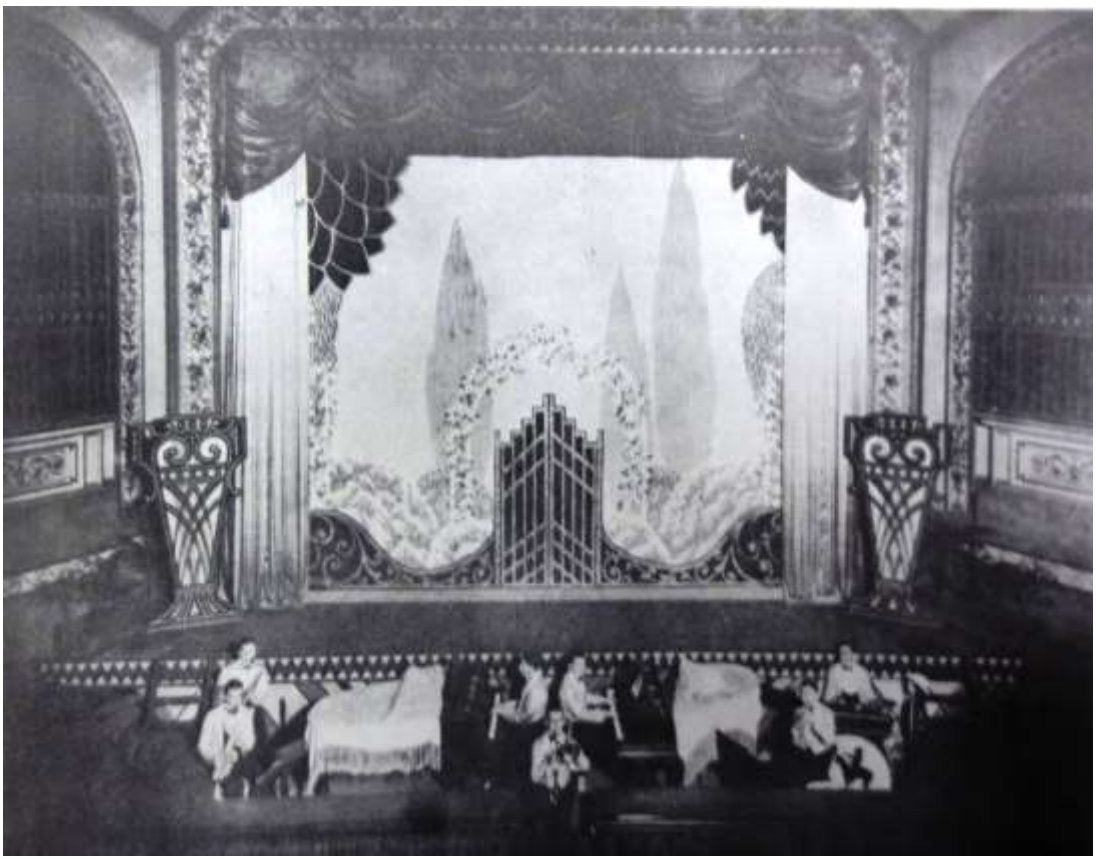


Figure 16 King's Cross Theatre orchestra, 1934

The Mighty Wurlitzer

A magnificent Wurlitzer organ costing £4,000 was installed, the fifth theatre in NSW to house such an instrument. Wurlitzer organs were always sold under the condition that a skilled American organist came out with it and was engaged as an organist by the theatre for a period of six months or more. Joseph Wayne, known as The Wizard of the Wurlitzer from the Wilmarte Theatre in Hollywood, accompanied the Kings Cross Theatre's mighty instrument. His contract eventually extended to about three years[127].

Talkies were introduced to the theatre in June 1929 and attracted a very large audience. The Western Electric Company installed the equipment at a cost of £6,000. The management retained the orchestra, as well as the Wurlitzer, and the organist was much applauded for his performances. The acoustic properties of the theatre were as nearly perfect as possible, and its appointments were sumptuous[128]. Waddington Pictures Ltd continued to operate until the end of 1933, when General Theatres Corporation gained control of the theatre[129].

The last picture show

Audience numbers at the King's Cross Theatre suffered in the 1950s from the impact of television, as did all cinemas. When the lease expired in April 1961, General Theatres presented their final programme: *Room at the Top* with Laurence Harvey and Simone Signoret. The theatre remained

closed for three weeks, and was reopened by the owners Preview Development Corporation in May 1961 with *And God Created Woman* starring Brigitte Bardot.

The company was only planning to keep the theatre operating until plans were completed for a new building to be constructed on the site. Screenings continued until April 1963, when the venue closed as a picture theatre after the final screening of *Judgement at Nuremburg*, which attracted a large audience[130].

Music takes over the theatre

The music promoter Lee Gordon converted the stalls area and began his Sound Lounge a few days later. With an area for dancing, music and little else, it closed after just four weeks. Gordon had previously promoted Johnny O'Keefe to the top, but had lost his magic touch, and died penniless in London in November 1963. However, only two weeks later, the Bird Cage Coffee House discotheque opened, featuring the African-American gospeller Brother John Sellers. But this venture folded after three months.

Figure 17 Surf City, 1963, featuring The Echoes

In September 1963, John Harrigan opened Surf City with Go-Go Girls on stage. This was much more successful, with thousands of teenagers on the floor doing the Stomp, the latest surfer dance craze. Billy Thorpe started his career there with the Aztecs. But, with plans for a new building completed, Surf City closed in February 1966. Demolition of the theatre commenced immediately, but after demolition, the owning company decided not to proceed with rebuilding, and sold the site. The Crest Hotel was then built, and traded under that name until new owners renamed it the Capital Hotel[131]. The name was later changed to the Chifley Hotel, and then to its present name, the Mercure Hotel with retail units on the ground floor.

King's Cross Newsreel Theatrette, 85 Darlinghurst Road

Yellow Cabs

Yellow Cabs Australia Ltd was formed in Sydney in 1925[132]. In 1927, the company owned and operated a depot, workshop and offices from 85 Darlinghurst Road (then called 83)[133]. By 1932, the building was owned by the estate of Mary F. Williams, and consisted of four shops and dwellings with two stories[134]. Then in about 1936, the building was renovated, with six shops and a basement garage, and was then three stories, including the basement[135].

Figure 18 King's Cross Newsreel Theatrette building

Wartime demand for news

World War II created a huge demand for news, and prior to television much of this came from film produced by the major newsreel companies[136]. In December 1940, Kenneth Frank Easton Cook applied to the Chief Secretary for a Public Hall licence at 83 Darlinghurst Road on behalf of the Times Syndicate. They intended to screen "newsreels and documentary films of government importance". The premises were situated on the first floor of the building, and the ground floor held a number of shops. The basement still operated as a motor service station, but if a licence was granted, they would have the service station removed. The floor was reinforced concrete and had previously been a dance floor and cabaret, having had as many as 200 dancers on it at once[137].

In February 1941, the Government Architect, M. R. Mandelson, pointed out that in the past the department had rejected applications for premises under or over shops or garages, in the interest of public safety. He suggested a few alternatives. One was to allow the showing of films, but to reserve

the right to reject an application when workshops, garages or other occupations considered hazardous existed above or below proposed halls. Kenneth Cook's solicitors, J. W. Maund & Kelynack, wrote to the Chief Secretary saying that their client was asking for a licence for a public hall, not a picture show, and many licences for picture shows have been granted very much higher from the ground floor than Mr. Cook was asking for. The structure was safe, and the shops underneath the premises ware reinforced with a fireproof concrete floor, walls and ceilings.

Figure 19 King's Cross Newsreel Theatrette opening, July 1941

In March 1941, the Under Secretary wrote to Mr. Cook with a detailed list of the types of films that could be shown under the restricted licence (grade (d) hall) for his premises. They were:

- Wholly or mainly news or current events films.
- Wholly or mainly natural scenery.
- Wholly or mainly commercial advertisements.
- Films used wholly or mainly by educational institutions for educational purposes.
- Wholly or mainly industrial or mainly manufacturing processes.
- Scientific films, including natural history films.
- Australian films for which the Minister has directed that the provisions of the Cinematograph Films Act (1935-1938) shall not apply (Australian quotas).

In other words: news, documentaries and ads. The theatre opened in July 1941, seating 298 patrons, running continuous sessions from 1:30pm to 11:30pm daily. But by the next month, Kenneth Cook was in trouble for also showing cartoons and a Warner Brothers' musical film.

Feature films are controversial

In September 1941, Mr. Cook applied for a licence to show a wider range of films, but the secretary of General Theatres Pty Ltd objected to the application. He claimed that the Olympia Theatre in Paddington and the King's Cross Theatre catered adequately for the needs of the area. He produced figures to show that attendance at the Olympia was 29% over a twelve month period, and 37% at the Kings Cross Theatre. He claimed that another licensed theatre would be undue competition. The secretaries of Greater Union Theatres Pty Ltd, Hoyts Theatres Pty Ltd and Sydney Theatres Pty Ltd also voiced the same objection. Mr. Cook replied that the objections were an attempt to maintain a monopoly in the picture business. In February 1942, the Chief Secretary decided to allow unrestricted screening of films, provided they did not exceed 2,000 feet in length. Feature films at the time were much longer than this.

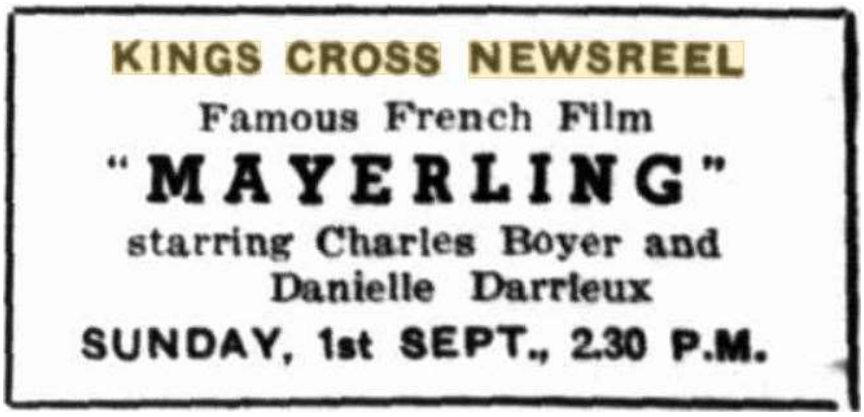


Figure 20 ***Mayerling*** **at King's Cross Newsreel, 1946**

But the big theatre chains were still not happy with the Newsreel Theatrette screening feature-length films, and in June 1942 they went to the District Court to try and stop it. Kenneth Cook's defence was that he intended to revive outstanding films of the past, and that the Savoy and Variety Theatres already presented this type of attraction. He pointed out that after the recent shelling of the Eastern Suburbs by Japanese submarines (on 31 May 1942), there was a falling off of attendance at his newsreel cinema for two days, but his patron's concern over the shelling was short-lived, and attendances were normal by the third day. The appeal against the decision to allow feature-length films was dismissed.

In the late 1940s, the theatre showed a few foreign language films on Sundays: the French film *Mayerling*, starring Charles Boyer in September 1946[138]. The Central Judeans organisation screened "a well-known picture, together with cartoons and Jewish documentaries", on a Sunday afternoon in March 1947[139]. The French film *Le Pere Tranquille* was screened on a Sunday afternoon in April 1948, presented by the L'Alliance Francaise de Sydney[140]. But having quietly got away with Sunday screenings targeted at a very limited audience, the theatre hit the headlines in August 1951 when it started to screen films with a broader appeal. Backed by the foreign film distributor Nathan Scheinwald, it ran *The Barber of Seville*. The big circuits were against Sunday showing, but only because they thought it would be bad for their business.

The battle for the Continental Sunday

By August 1951, the Chief Secretary (Clive Evatt) granted permits to the King's Cross Newsreel Theatre and the Premier Theatre in Surry Hills to show educational and cultural films on Sunday nights. But the Rev. S. W. McKibbin, president of the NSW Council of Churches, claimed that the churches were up in arms about this decision. A movie exhibitor said the move would be a step towards "the bright and gay Continental Sunday", but Rev. McKibbin replied that the Continental Sunday was "the scourge of European civilisation". A spokesman for the Chief Secretary said the granting of permits was an experiment for that area and that the films would be of the same type as those exhibited in suburban churches, conveying a message or a moral. Sacred music would also be featured[141].

But on the day before Sunday screenings were due to start, exhibitors and cinema workers protested against the screenings, as the NSW Motion Pictures Exhibitors' Association had passed a resolution condemning the move. Exhibitors did not wish to become involved in a controversy over Sunday observance, and believed Sunday shows would be uneconomic. Mr. W. Harrop, the secretary of the Theatrical Employees' Association said that his union would not be a party to Sunday screenings, as theatre staff already worked six days a week when other workers had a five day week[142].

Mr. Kenneth Cook said that all sessions of the Kings Cross Newsreel Theatrette were packed for the first Sunday session. People queued up outside the theatre for an hour before the first session at 1:30pm. *The Barber of Seville* was screened, and religious music was played during the intervals[143]. Sunday screenings were a great success, and after two weeks, Sunday attendances at the Kings Cross Theatrette on Sunday were 1,230, and those at the Premier Theatre in Surry Hills were over 1,000[144]. But, in a move to legally test film shows on Sundays, summonses were served on Kenneth Cook and Nathan Scheinwald by the secretary of the Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association, alleging that they had broken the Theatres and Public Halls Act (1908-1946) by showing films on Sunday August 12[145].

Figure 21 King's Cross Newsreel - Sunday screenings, 1951

In November 1951, a magistrate fined Kenneth Cook £5 and Nathan Scheinwald £10 for allowing public entertainment in the King's Cross Theatrette on a Sunday. Scheinwald's barrister said a recent public opinion poll showed that most people in NSW favoured Sunday films, and the prosecution was made under an antiquated section of an old law, and was out of touch with public opinion. The magistrate may have privately felt the same, because he noted that he could have imposed a maximum penalty of £100, but was imposing not much more that a nominal one[146].

The ban on Sunday film screening generated much discussion in the press at the time, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorialised that if public entertainment in NSW was still governed by a 1908 law, then it was time the law was changed. To limit Sunday entertainment to sacred concerts was to run counter to public opinion and also to common sense. Instead of the Chief Secretary, who was sympathetic with Sunday films, granting permits whose validity could be open to challenge, Parliament should bring the statute more in line with present-day conditions. The eager public response to Sunday cinema entertainment reflected the need for some leavening of the Puritan Sabbath in Sydney. In London the showing of Sunday films was an established practice, and Sydney should be allowed to grow up in the same way[147].

Midnight-to-dawn movies

In September 1954, the Kings Cross Newsreel Theatrette commenced midnight-to-dawn film sessions. The cinema conducted the sessions every night except Saturday, and screened Continental films. The first programme was the French film *The Raven* and the Italian film *Carmela*. Two new all-night restaurants also opened the same night at King's Cross. One served Continental food and had a gypsy band playing continuous music. The secretary of the King's Cross Chamber of Commerce said that the new facilities would help to restore the pre-war night life to King's Cross, and that the night lights of King's Cross were rapidly being turned on again[148].

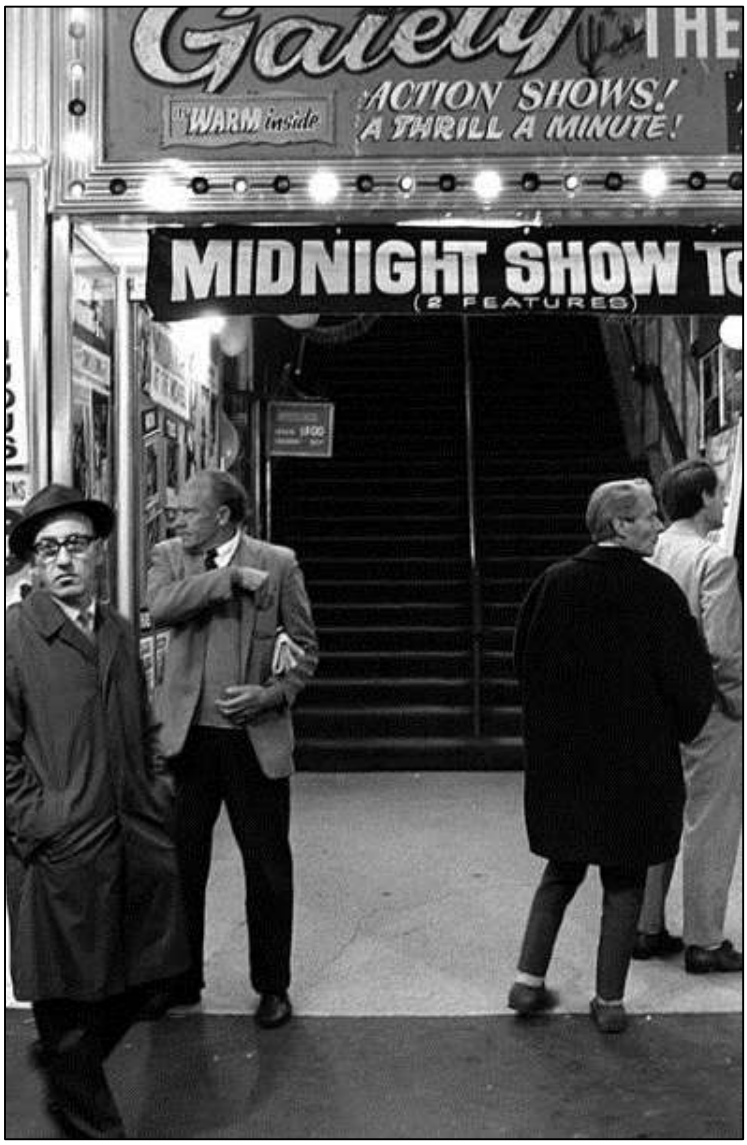


Figure 22 Gaiety Theatre - midnight-to-dawn sessions

In October 1954, the King's Cross Theatrette made another foray into Sunday screenings by advertising free afternoon and evening film sessions on Sundays. Because the theatre was not allowed under the Theatres and Public Halls Act to charge for Sunday sessions, the public would be admitted for free. Advice from a Queen's Counsel and the Chief Secretary's Department was that Sunday sessions could be conducted as long as patrons were not charged admission.

Predictably, the president of the NSW Council of Churches, the Right Reverend W. G. Hilliard, said that they were opposed to Sunday cinemas because they were not in keeping with the spirit of Sunday, which should be a day of reflection, rest and worship. The president of the Methodist Conference, the Rev. A. G. Manefield, also said that Methodists disagree with this proposal entirely. On the other hand, a spokesman for the Roman Catholic Church said that the church had no official opinion on the matter, and it was up to individual Catholics[149].

Despite the legal and official advice, the free open-air Sunday film show was moved to Fitzroy Gardens. The syndicate manager said that this was because two days beforehand a sergeant from Darlinghurst licensing police had visited and officially told him that films could not be shown under the Act in a registered public hall or theatre. The manager pointed out that this was a civilised place, and London and New York had pictures in ordinary places on Sundays, so why shouldn't Sydney? As well, the King's Cross Chamber of Commerce supported moves for Sunday films. About 500 people attended the open-air performance, presented by International Midnight Amusements. Proceeds of donations went to the King's Cross RSL sub-branch. He said that the first night was purely a test, but it showed the public did want this sort of thing[150].

Two theatres in one

By March 1955, the Theatre was advertising itself as two theatres in one: a Newsreel and Revival Theatre. The management would always try to obtain patrons' requests and many revival features were shown there over the years[151]. But in November 1956, a report to the Chief Secretary stated that the theatre had become sub-standard and was a danger to public safety. Kenneth Cook was told to address several items or his licence would not be renewed[152].

Figure 23 King's Cross Newsreel letterhead, 1955

In April 1959, the Chief Secretary suspected that Sunday screenings had restarted. However, a police inspection showed that patrons were admitted at midnight Sunday night, and screening commenced 10 minutes after that. Other midnight shows were conducted on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights. Most films were the conventional type, with the occasional horror film included. Tickets for the Sunday night screening were available Saturday night, so no breach of the Act was committed.

Following the closure of the King's Cross Theatre in 1963, a new policy of screening two features was started[153]. In November 1965, the cinema skated on thin ice again when the Chief Secretary's office

received a complaint that the theatre was showing a strip tease film, as advertised in the local paper, and that live strippers were performing on stage. The local constabulary duly attended a performance, and found that the advertised film showed strip tease dancers performing in a nightclub in England. The “live strippers” turned out to be a girl in a bikini who sauntered across the stage carrying a sign advertising the Strip-a-Go-Go Discotheque in Darlinghurst Road. So no objectionable incidents were deemed to have taken place.

In April 1966, the theatre’s name was changed to the Gaiety Theatre. Then in 1973, the Gaiety closed and reopened a few weeks later as the Penthouse Cinema. The Australian sex-horror film *Night of Fear*, premiered at the Penthouse Cinema in March 1973. It was refused Australian classification because of indecency[154]. The Penthouse operated a few years then closed in 1976 and was converted into an amusement machine parlour. In recent years, the first floor was used as the gymnasium KX Fitness.

Figure 24 King's Cross Newsreel as the Penthouse Cinema, 1973

While this cinema operated well after the golden age of movies, it played a significant part in challenging the old laws that restricted the types of films people could watch and when they could watch them. It also stood up against the monopolistic practices of the large cinema chains, and for this the proprietor Kenneth Cook made a worthwhile contribution to the liberal cinema scene of today.

Minerva/Metro Theatre, 20 Orwell Street

Orwell House

In 1828, Governor Sir Ralph Darling ordered that the land along the ridge of the Woolloomooloo Peninsula (now King's Cross and Pott's Point) be divided into large estates, governed by strict "villa conditions" which required the construction of large houses and the establishment of extensive grounds. The lots were then granted to various leading members of the community in 1828 and 1831. Over time, seventeen grand colonial mansions were built, set in huge gardens up to ten acres along the ridge on either side of Darlinghurst Road/Macleay Street, stretching from William Street right down to end of the point.

All the villas were set in lavish gardens and the grounds were stocked with exotic plants collected from all over the world. The leafy character of parts of the area owes much to the gardens established in that period. The attraction of the site is obvious even today. It commands sweeping views across Sydney, from the Blue Mountains to Sydney Heads. It was close enough for easy travel to the city, but far enough from the increasingly noisy, smelly and crowded city centre.

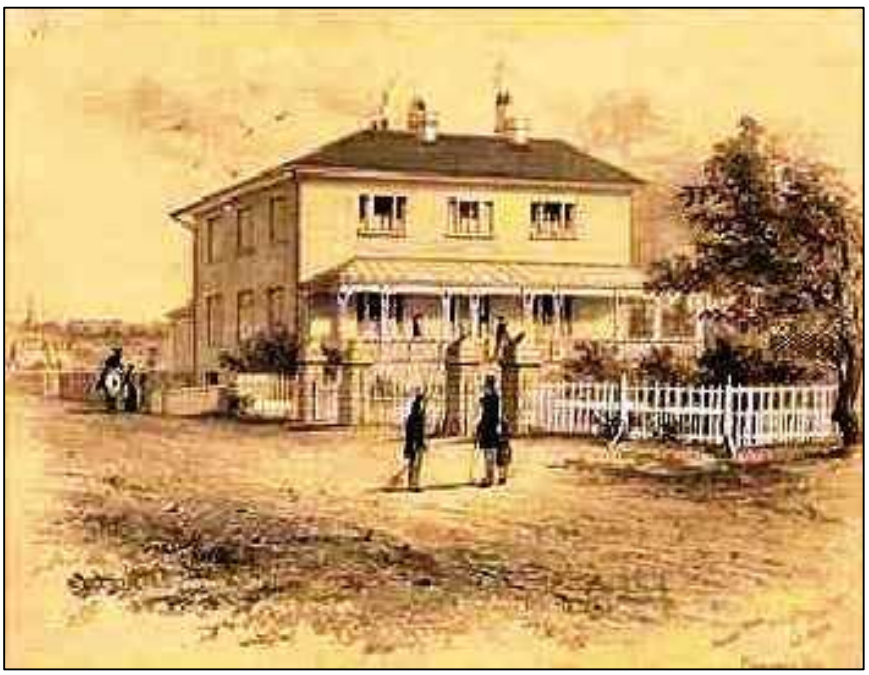


Figure 25 Orwell House (State Library of NSW)

Orwell House was built by John Stephen (1771-1833), who later became the first Solicitor-General of NSW. The land where it stood was the first granted in the area and the house was the first villa built on the ridge, begun around 1829. After Stephen's death, it passed through a succession of private owners until its demolition in 1937[155].

The Minerva Centre graces King's Cross

A live entertainment complex called the Minerva Centre was built on the site of Orwell House in 1938-1939. This consisted of the Minerva Theatre, Minerva Cafe and Nightclub (later the 2KY radio studios) and Metro Chambers (an office and apartment building). They were all designed by the Sydney architect Bruce Dellit (1898-1942) to sit harmoniously on blocks of land fronted by Macleay

Street and continuing down Orwell Street. Dellitt is best known as the designer of the Art Deco ANZAC War Memorial in Hyde Park, constructed in 1934 after winning a design competition.

Figure 26 Minerva Centre (National Library of Australia)

The whole exterior and interior design was in the clean Streamline Moderne style utilising various surface planes that were lit in imaginative ways. This style is a late type of Art Deco architecture that emerged in the 1930s, emphasising curving forms and long horizontal lines. The street frontage was stepped with awnings, curved glass and soaring vertical neon incorporated in a tower. The theatre exterior also featured several small shops and a candy bar facing the street, originally all in shades of pastel green.

The interior was sleek and sophisticated with plentiful use of frosted glass, chrome and mirrors in the foyer. There were decorative murals in the upper circle and there was armchair seating throughout. There was an orchestra pit and the projection room contained all the necessary equipment for movies. No expense was spared in building this beautiful theatre and it incorporated every possible modern feature as well as having perfect acoustics. It was air-conditioned and carpeted throughout[156]. The Minerva Theatre was intended to be one of a pair, with the other, the Paradise Theatre, facing Macleay Street, but the second theatre did not eventuate. Orwell Street is narrow, and as a result the theatre has never been seen to its best advantage. At its opening, the location was not as well-known as it is now, and the early publicity featured maps of its position.

While the building of the Minerva Centre started in May 1938, unforeseen delays meant the theatre did not open until May 1939. The opening night on 18 May 1939 was a gala occasion: a crowd of over 4,000 gathered outside the theatre to watch the arrival of the immaculately-dressed first night audience. The arrival of the better known social and theatrical personalities was greeted with cheers

and clapping. The first play presented at the Minerva was *Idiot's Delight*, a comedy with a sombre anti-war message at a time when the bombs had already started falling in Europe[157].

Figure 27 Minerva Theatre

While the theatre was intended primarily for live shows, films were occasionally screened. In August 1939, a ten-day season of selected motion pictures was run in between live productions. Some of the films advertised at the "Minerva – Australia's Wonder Theatre" were: *Three Smart Girls Grow Up* with Deanna Durbin, *Midnight* with Claudette Colbert and Don Ameche, and *Trouble Brewing* with George Formby[158].

But before the Minerva was even a year old, audience numbers dropped to a worrying level, and there was talk of closing the theatre[159]. Lovers of legitimate theatre feared that the theatre would become a full-time motion picture house, but in 1941 the current manager claimed he had turned a loss into a profit by that time[160]. The theatre was taken over in May 1941 by Whitehall Productions Ltd, led by Kathleen Robinson. This company produced a wide range of commercial works, usually starring actors who were well known in radio[161].

MGM buys the Minerva

In 1946, the shareholders of the Minerva decided to offer the theatre for sale for £87,000[162]. Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) purchased the theatre in 1948, and announced that it would use it as a picture theatre[163]. Then in April 1950, MGM announced that the Minerva would soon switch from live shows to film, showing first-release MGM films. The principal director, Kathleen Robinson, said that because of its location, the theatre did not attract enough people from all parts of Sydney for legitimate theatre.

The managing director of MGM, Mr. Bernard Freeman, said the Minerva would present films simultaneously with MGM's other city theatres, the St James and Liberty Theatres[164]. This left only

three full-time theatres devoted to live performances: two of these were presenting vaudeville and the other a musical play[165]. The gala opening in June 1950 featured the MGM film *The Forsyte Saga* (called *That Forsyte Woman* in the US), starring Errol Flynn, Greer Garson, Walter Pigeon and Janet Leigh, plus Tom and Jerry cartoons[166].

Figure 28 Metro Theatre (Sydney Architecture website)

In early 1952, the name was changed to Metro King's Cross, in line with most of MGM's other cinemas. Initially, MGM newspaper ads referred to it as Metro-Minerva[167], but from August it was called Metro King's Cross. MGM's stable of Sydney cinemas at that time consisted of the St James and the three Metros (Manly, Bondi Junction and King's Cross)[168]. In July 1954, the cinema was converted to a Cinemascope screen and the Perspecta stereophonic sound system, introduced by the film *Flame and the Flesh*, starring Lana Turner (claimed to be "even more dangerous now as a brunette!")[169].

Suzie Wong and Hair on stage

As with most other suburban cinemas faced with the impact of television, the Metro ceased screening films and was turned into a concert and dance venue during the late 1950s and 1960s. *The World of Suzie Wong* played there in 1961, but probably its main claim to fame was as the venue for the original Australian production of the rock musical *Hair*. The production premiered in June 1969. It was produced by Harry M. Miller and directed and designed by Jim Sharman. The cast included Reg Livermore and John Waters, and from 1970 Marcia Hines. The musical backing was provided by an augmented line-up of the progressive rock group Tully. The production ran in Sydney until 1971,

and despite early fears that it might be censored or closed down, it was a huge success. During 1971, the production moved to Melbourne[170].

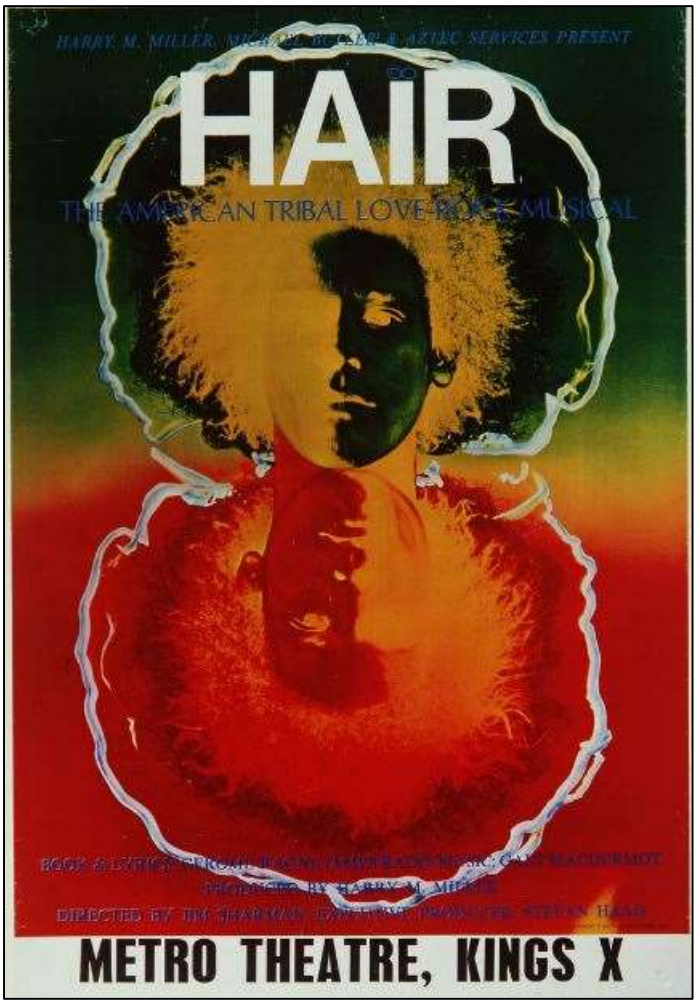


Figure 29 Hair poster, Metro Theatre, 1969

Kennedy-Miller makes movies from the Metro

The theatre was finally sold in 1979 and became a specialty supermarket. The building was stripped of its fittings and rejuvenated under National Trust conditions to become the Metro International Food Fair, opening in March 1981[171]. But the food fair was not a success, and the site stood empty until it was purchased in 1982 to become a soundstage and recording facility for the Kennedy-Miller organisation.

Figure 30 Metro Theatre as the International Food Fair, 1981

It remains the same today, basically unaltered and sensitively maintained by its owners. The elegant lobby is still pretty much as it was fifty years ago, and it sometimes appears as the location in films, television shows or pop videos. Films are no longer being shown as the Metro King's Cross, but they are made there instead[172].

Paddington

Chauvel Cinema, Paddington Town Hall, 249 Oxford Street

A new town hall for Paddington

After Paddington was incorporated as a Council in 1860 with about 1,000 houses and 3,000 residents, the first Town Hall was built on Oxford Street on the site of the later Royal Women's Hospital. Paddington continued to prosper, and by 1890 was second only to Balmain Council in revenue received. A new Paddington Town Hall was constructed in 1890-1891 on the corner of Oatley Road and Oxford Street. The overall architectural style is Victorian Free Classical.

The Town Hall was unusual in that it was intended from the beginning to generate income from hiring out the larger supper room and the smaller ballroom for balls, dances, concerts and public ceremonies. The clock tower was added in 1904 in commemoration of the (1902) coronation of King Edward VII. The Main Hall is located on the first floor, and was significantly altered in 1933-1934 and redecorated in the Art Deco style[173].

The ballroom becomes an arthouse cinema

In 1977, the City of Sydney, the Australia Council and the Australian Film Commission provided $500,000 to redevelop the Town Hall as a centre to include an exhibition space, restaurant and a cinema[174]. The former ballroom became a single-screen cinema, with the fully sprung dance floor remaining under the seats. The cinema was initially called the Ozone (it advertised itself as "The Ozone: a breath of fresh air") and was operated as a non-profit venture by the Australian Film Institute (AFI), showing mainly art-house films[175]. In about 1983, the name was changed to the Chauvel Cinema, in honour of the pioneering Australian film maker, Charles Chauvel[176].

Figure 31 Chauvel Cinema, Paddington Town Hall

Charles Chauvel made films from 1926 to 1959, a period that encompassed silent films, the advent of sound, colour and eventually television documentary. He was producer and director, wrote his own scripts and handled casting and much of the publicity. His wife Elsa collaborated as scriptwriter, and they were considered a film-making partnership. His first sound film in 1933, *In the Wake of the Bounty*, gave Errol Flynn his first screen role as Fletcher Christian. The 1940 blockbuster *Forty Thousand Horsemen* is one of his best remembered. He launched several stars, including Chips Rafferty and Peter Finch. In 1955, he made *Jedda*, Australia's first feature film in colour, and the first to give starring roles to two indigenous people[177].

In 1989, the name was again changed, to the AFI Cinema. A correspondent to the *Sydney Morning Herald* questioned why the cinema was no longer named after the great cinema pioneer, and pointed out that Australia Post was bringing out stamps featuring Chips Rafferty and Charles Chauvel at that time[178]. In 1995, a second screen was added[179].

Closure and resurrection

By 2005, the cinema was again known as the Chauvel, and its arthouse style was indicated by its new motto "If it's on at cinemas everywhere, it's not on here". However, by this year the cinema was suffering a sharp decline in revenue, and a feasibility study ordered by the AFI found that it would lose up to $30,000 per month without improvements of at least $250,000 to add more screens. Long-term managers Alex Meskovic and Chris Kiely blamed the downward trend on the popularity of home theatre systems for watching DVDs on big plasma screens, as well as the current poor quality of arthouse films[180]. The rival arthouse cinema in Glebe, the Valhalla, suffered the same downturn and closed its doors in August 2005, never to reopen (today it is a block of apartments). The Chauvel closed in September. This alarmed many theatre and arts patrons across Sydney, and a campaign was started to save the cinema.

Then in December 2005, Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore announced that the City had reached a long-term lease agreement with the Palace Cinema group to again screen films at the Chauvel Cinema. Palace announced that they intended to return something to the film industry, and by managing the operation of the Chauvel, undertook to screen a mix of movies including commercial and art house, and would conduct film festivals. They would also showcase local film makers, and institute an array of film development seminars, discussions, rehearsal space and conferences.

Figure 32 Antonio Zeccola (Italianicious website)

Palace owner Antonio Zeccola said that they were Australia's leading distributor of Australian films, and had a vested interest in ensuring that the Baz Luhrmanns, Jane Campions and Peter Weirs of tomorrow are nurtured and supported[181]. Lord Mayor Clover Moore officially reopened the Chauvel in July 2006. The cinema had been refurbished with a new café bar and wireless lounge, lower ticket prices and state-of-the-art projection facilities[182]. The Chauvel continues to operate today, one of only four cinemas still operating in the eastern fringe suburbs of Sydney (the others being the Palace Verona, the Golden Age in Surry Hills and Govinda's in Darlinghurst).

Crystal Palace Theatre, 202 Jersey Road

Horses v. trams

In 1888, the horse-drawn Omnibus Company's stables were constructed in Point Piper Road (now Jersey Road) on a site near Sutherland Street. At the time, Sutherland Street ended at Forbes Street, and was only extended to Point Piper Road in 1917. But by 1905, the popularity of the tram network had forced the closure of the stables[183].

Australian Photo Play builds a Crystal Palace

The Crystal Palace Theatre was constructed on the site in 1912, by then called 202 Jersey Road. It was one of the theatres that screened films produced by the Australian Photo Play Company. Other nearby picture theatres that screened their films at this time were the Oxford Theatre in Paddington, the Crown Star Theatre and Surry Picture Palace in Surry Hills, and the Royal Star Picture Theatre in Redfern[184]. At the end of 1912, the *Sydney Morning Herald* mentioned the clear pictures, comfortable seating, excellent ventilation and minimum prices at the Crystal Palace[185].

The theatre was not mentioned in *Sands' Directory* or the press after 1916, so it must have closed then[186]. By the 1940s, the site was occupied by Thomas Mills and Sons[187] and used as a furniture repository[188]. Today, the site houses a block of apartments, known as The Stables.

Empire Picture Palace, 166 Hargrave Street

Omnibus stables

From 1896, the Sydney Tramway and Omnibus Company used 166 Hargrave Street Paddington as stables for the city to Woollahra route. Then from 1909, the site was owned by the cab proprietor James Donovan as livery stables. He was called a bus proprietor in 1909, then a cab proprietor in following years[189]. From this time, omnibuses were overtaken by the extended tram network as Sydney's main form of transport.

The Pommy Theatre

When Donovan moved his business a few blocks away to Holdsworth Street in 1914, he leased the Hargrave Street land to two Englishmen who transformed the site into the Empire Picture Palace. It was referred to by the locals as the Pommy Theatre because of its British owners. It was very small at 45ft by 100ft, with bare wooden platforms for seats. The theatre was later bought by Oxford Pictures, and controlled by Messrs. Black and Arthur Tinsdale[190]. The theatre opened in September 1914[191]. It can be seen from the Spartan interior in the opening night photograph that there was some irony in the theatre's name, as it looks more like the stables it came from than the palace it now claimed to be.

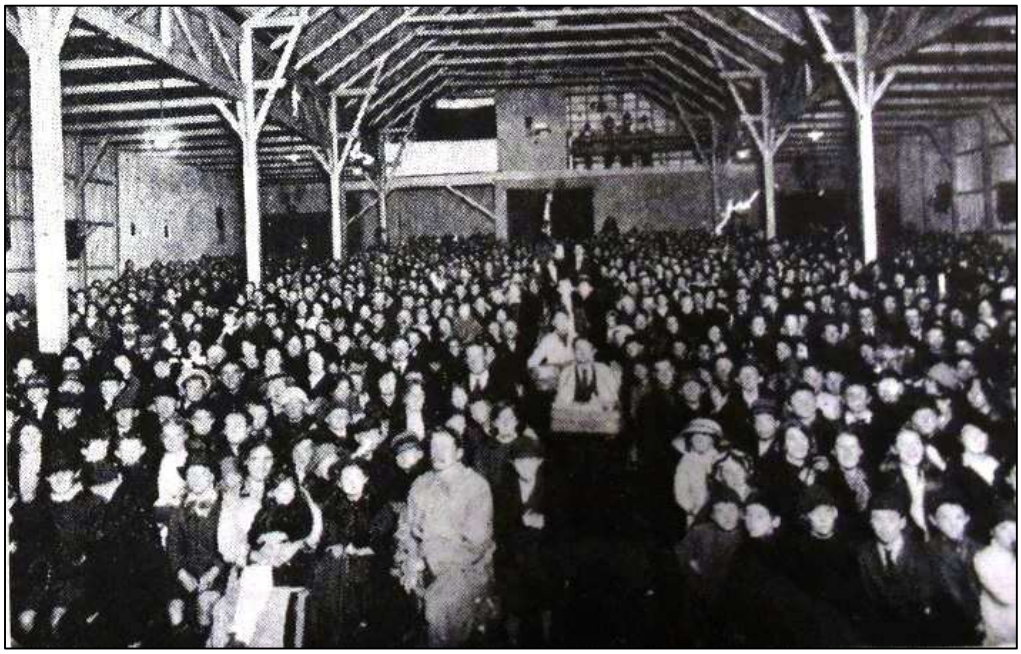


Figure 33 Empire Picture Palace, opening night, 1914

In December 1922, the contents of the theatre were advertised for auction, including two Gaumont Biograph machines (projectors), a pianoforte, and 143 tip-up chairs[192]. Two months later, a notice was put in the paper inviting claims on the assigned estate of Leslie Brooks of Empire Pictures, Hargrave Street, Paddington. James Donovan remained the owner of the land, so the late Mr. Brooks must have been an investor in the picture theatre[193].

In May 1923, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Gordon Theatres Ltd were to acquire the building known as Empire Pictures, together with plant, and planned to demolish the existing building and erect in its place a modern cinema theatre, and carry on the business of a moving

picture theatre and photographic proprietors. However, this rebuilding did not happen, as there was no mention in the press of the theatre closing or reopening. However, Violet Stewart probably took over the management of the theatre at this time.

A suspicious fire and a fiery relationship

Then in January 1926, the Empire was advertised for sale or lease over seven years[194]. Disaster struck two months later when the theatre was destroyed in a late night fire. The evening programme had completed and there was no sign of fire when the building was locked up for the night. The coroner's inquest into the fire uncovered the stormy relationship between Mrs. Stewart and her husband John.

The insurance company, the Insurance Office of Australia Ltd, apparently suspected the fire was deliberately lit (especially after the recent attempt to sell or lease the building), because its lawyer asked Mrs. Stewart if she had ever offered to give anyone £40 if a fire occurred. She denied this. She did mention that on one occasion there was some excitement after the pictures had finished when a revolver accidentally went off in her hand. She explained that she was carrying a revolver in her stocking that night because a man had threatened to shoot her husband. William O'Connor, who ran a refreshment stall at the theatre, said that after Mrs. Stewart took over, attendances had been very bad. He said the Stewarts always seemed to fighting between themselves and Mr. Stewart used to chase her about in the theatre late at night.

Mr. O'Connor mentioned that once when her husband rushed at her with an iron bar, he interfered and took her side. While the husband did not assault him, Mrs. Stewart beat him about the head with a broom for his trouble. The Coroner offered the opinion that it was not a safe practice to interfere between a man and wife at any time. He returned an open verdict on the cause of the fire[195]. Violet Stewart was declared bankrupt by the Supreme Court soon after the loss of the theatre[196]. As only the blackened walls remained after the fire, the building was demolished. The site remained vacant until 1930 when the Kingscourt Flats were built, a small group of six apartments[197]. Today the apartment block is known as Hargrave Court and occupies 168 Hargrave Street. The picture theatre site at number 166 serves as the car park for the apartments.

The Empire Picture Palace began in the early days of motion pictures, but was apparently not a success. It was too small to make much money, and probably suffered from being in a small street some distance from public transport. The theatre never had the resources to advertise its programmes in the press, unlike the bigger venues. In any case, there may have been an oversupply of Empire picture theatres in the eastern fringe at one time: at 17a Oxford Street Darlinghurst (1910-1915) and at 202 Cleveland Street Redfern (1926-1960).

Five Ways/Odeon Theatre, 220-222 Glenmore Road

The original picture theatre

Deep Dene was a four-acre estate with a large house built in about 1846 by the solicitor William Godfrey McCarthy. The entrance to the estate was on Glenmore Road, at the site of the present number 222. William McCarthy sold off parts of Deep Dene in 1877, 1882 and 1922 when the house was pulled down[198]. By 1914, number 222 was occupied by the artificial flower seller Wilhelm (William) Kutnewsky[199].

The original cinema on the right-of-way site was built in 1914 by Tim Wiseman[200], and was advertising as Five Ways Pictures, Glenmore Road Paddington[201]. The theatre seated 1,500 patrons[202]. In July 1919, the owners Deepdene Land and Building Company leased the theatre to the picture showman Thomas Hickey. Then in 1920, the block of land including the picture theatre was sold for £5,000[203] to the Hickey family. The theatre was managed by Thomas Hickey from this time[204].

A new theatre

The Hickey family operated the old theatre until February 1928 when the Municipality of Paddington approved an application to demolish the building and construct a new theatre[205]. This was opened on 25 January 1929 by William Bates, the Mayor of Paddington[206]. An unusual feature of the building was the tall facade, behind which were the ladies and gentlemen's toilets for dress circle patrons. The projectionist was Colin Hickey, Tom's brother.

Now being built at the Five Ways, Paddington.

Figure 34 Five Ways Theatre, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1928

By 1955, Greater Union Theatres had taken over the Five Ways Theatre, and installed a new Cinemascope screen, responding to the need for wide-screen presentations (and to the threat of the rapidly approaching television)[207]. By October 1957, the theatre was operating as the Odeon. Tom Hickey remained as manager, buying and booking all of his programmes.

A grocery store

The theatre closed on 19 December 1958, another victim of the popularity of television. By 1962, the building was being used as a store for old theatre equipment owned by Greater Union. The ground floor foyer contained a fruit and vegetable shop run by Chris Tourvas[208].

Figure 35 The Le Garde Twins, Tom and Ted

In 1964, the Legarde Twins, Tom and Ted, purchased the building and converted it to stage Country and Western music shows, complete with two dance floors. The twins wanted to present a local version of the Grand Old Opry from Nashville and brought out Marty Robbins and Lorne Greene to perform at their shows. But the venture was not a success, and in July 1965 the Five Ways Theatre was sold to Woolworths Properties Ltd by the liquidators.

In 1987 it was leased to Van Traders Pty Ltd, then to Clancy's Food Stores, and by 2002 it was known as the Paddington Grocer. On becoming a supermarket, the high facade was cut down to half its size, removing the projection room and most of the dress circle. At present, the building is used by Thomas Dux Grocer, a gourmet grocery outlet owned by Woolworths.

Figure 36 Five Ways Theatre as the Paddington Grocer, 2002

Olympia/Odeon/Mandala/Academy Twin Theatre, 11 Oxford Street

Marshall's Paddington Brewery

The Paddington Brewery was founded in 1857 by Yorkshireman Joseph Marshall, at the corner of Oxford and Dowling Streets, on the east side. He was soon selling his home brew to hotels and taverns, and his business expanded rapidly, mainly because of the excellent quality of his brew. A number of prizes were awarded at agricultural shows for his draught beer, bottled ale and porter. He won first prize at the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1876.

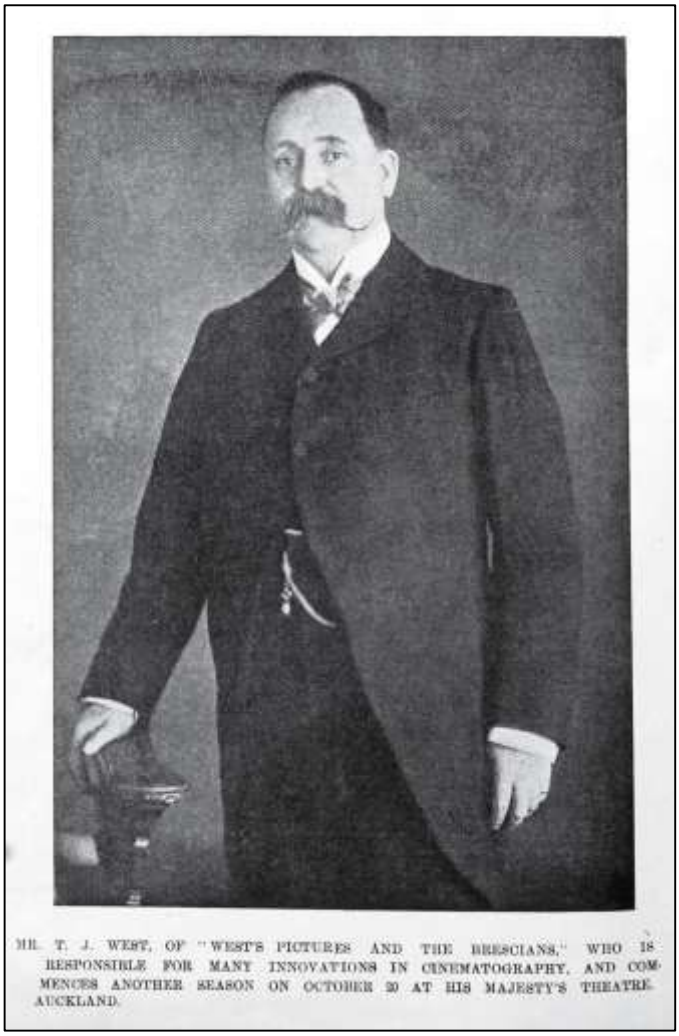
By the time he died in 1880, his brewery was one of the largest in Sydney. His sons kept the business going, and in 1909 the brewery property was sold and operations relocated to Leichhardt. The brewery was purchased by Tooth & Co and closed in 1911. The Tooth's directors weren't as interested in Marshall's award-winning ales as they were in acquiring his network of hotels for selling their own products.

T. J. West's Olympia Theatre

In 1911, the English entrepreneur Thomas James West (1855-1916), converted the brewery site into an immense theatre, seating 2,500 patrons on two levels. It opened it on 26 December 1911 as West's Olympia Theatre. The first film screened was *The Power of Love*, accompanied by the De Groens Vice-Regal Orchestra. T. J. West, as he was usually known, was a pioneer of the cinema industry in Australia. He was not the first to exploit cinematography in this country, but he was the originator of permanent picture entertainment. It was largely due to his enterprise that moving pictures attained a high level of public esteem[209].

After West died in 1916, the theatre was renovated and reopened in July 1919 as the Olympia Theatre. It aimed to provide pictorial, musical and dramatic entertainment: motion pictures five nights a week and vaudeville one night a week[210]. In 1920, the theatre was taken over by Union Theatres, renovated further and renamed to New West's, but by 1922 had reverted to West's Olympia[211].

By 1923, business was slow, and the owners considered converting the building to a full grade theatre for live performances only. This scheme was abandoned due to the expense involved, and Union Theatres Ltd informed the Chief Secretary's office that their long-term objective was to close the theatre and sell it. Fortunately, the theatre survived this slow period in its history[212]. The theatre claimed to be the first suburban cinema in Sydney to install a sound system and show talking pictures in the late 1920s[213].



MR. T. J. WEST, OF "WEST'S PICTURES AND THE BRESCIANS," WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MANY INNOVATIONS IN CINEMATOGRAPHY, AND COMMENCES ANOTHER SEASON ON OCTOBER 20 AT HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE, AUCKLAND.

Figure 37 T. J. West, 1906 (Auckland Council)

Figure 38 West's Olympia Theatre

The Great Depression of the 1930s caused significant changes to Union Theatres. The group was liquidated and its assets purchased by Greater Union Theatres. Some modernisation was carried out in the mid to late 1930s, including a new proscenium, wall decorations, and auditorium light fittings.

Seating capacity was reduced to 1,741. In 1953, it was again renovated and renamed Odeon Darlinghurst. But, like many other suburban cinemas, competition from television forced it to close in 1960, and it remained empty until 1969.

Figure 39 Olympia Theatre as the Odeon Cinema, 1956

The Mandala rocks the Olympia

In 1966, the Greek Orthodox Community of NSW Pty Ltd purchased the building. Since its closure in 1960 it had been vandalised and had deteriorated to an advanced state of disrepair. The Government Architect reported to the Chief Secretary in April 1966 that "the whole building was in a dilapidated and unhygienic condition"[214]. After extensive maintenance work was completed in 1969, the new owners obtained a new theatre licence as the Pallas Cinema, but it was eventually opened in November that year as the Mandala Cinema[215]. The new name made a clean break with the past, and symbolised the new emerging Paddington[216].

With the coming of the 1960s, showmen discovered that cinema-goers were mainly 17-35 year olds, so movies shifted in character to attract this age group. The Mandala specialised in cult and rock music films such as Bob Dylan's *Don't Look Back*[217], but only operated for a short time, under various lessees. By 1970, Mandala Theatres Pty Ltd had left and the Greek Orthodox Community leased the theatre to Quality Films Ltd, of Bligh Street, Sydney. This organisation planned to renovate the building and turn it into a modern cinema[218].

Modern twin cinemas emerge

The leasing company, now called Academy Theatres Pty Ltd, set about converting the theatre into two separate cinemas in the one building, one seating 500 and the other seating 300, creating Sydney's first twin cinema. The cinemas would be back-to-back, with a single projection room serving both. They were to be called Academy Twin No. 1 and No. 2, but were later known as Cinema 500 and Cinema 300. The rest of the building was converted into a restaurant and a nightclub[219].

The name Academy was chosen as a homage to the famous Academy Cinemas in Oxford Street, London. The emphasis in the new theatre was on selective programming of films with artistic and cultural appeal. The twin cinemas were modern in that they dispensed with traditional picture palace features such as stage curtains, proscenium arches, marble busts, nymphs and atmospheric cloudlands. They were also small, following overseas trends towards intimate-style cinemas. They opened on 29 June 1973 with Roman Polanski's *Macbeth*, supported by *Fritz the Cat,* the first X-rated cartoon film. The manager Leon Boyle said in 1986 that the cinema had survived the video boom (of the mid-1970s), and that they seemed to be giving patrons what they wanted[220]. By this time no vestige remained of the old theatre interior, although the Edwardian facade is the same as the 1911 building, minus the decorative portico.

Figure 40 Academy Twin Cinema interior

Closure of the Academy Twin

The Palace Cinema group took over the operation in the 1990s. The Academy Twin Cinemas operated until June 2010 when they were closed following a rental disagreement with the Greek Orthodox Community directors[221]. In November 2014, Cinema 500 was leased for six months and relaunched as the New Olympia Theatre to stage a live musical production called *The Island of Doctor Moron*. The show was written by Chris Dockrill, a high school drama teacher from Kempsey, NSW. After the show's run ended early in 2015, the theatre has remained empty.

The Olympia Theatre was one of the first purpose-built suburban cinemas after the first few years of moving pictures that saw temporary open-air structures of wood or canvas, as entrepreneurs rushed to exploit the new form of mass entertainment. The Olympia experienced ups and downs right through its history, nearly closing in the 1920s and then actually closing for a few years in the face of the rise of television in the 1960s.

Resurrected as a cult cinema in the late 1960s and as a popular art-house cinema a few years later, it looked set to survive indefinitely, but its doors were closed once again over a leasing dispute. Its future is now uncertain, but it has been one of the few long-term survivors of the century-long history of cinema in the suburbs.

Oxford Theatre, 383-385 Oxford Street

Entertainment in a canvas tent

The land occupied by the Oxford Theatre was Crown land granted to George Newcombe in 1840. The painter Emanuel Watson purchased part of the land on the corner of Newcombe and Gordon Streets in December 1877, and his descendants Charles and John Watson acquired it in 1898 and retained until 1916. Coachbuilders George Olding and George Parker leased part of the land and operated the Paddington Coach Works from 1898 until the lease ran out in 1916. The coachworks occupied the Gordon Street end of the large block, and shops were erected on the Oxford Street end.

The centre of the land was not used until the theatre entrepreneurs Victor Teasdale and George Blackmore erected a canvas tent of 100 feet by 50 feet in early 1911 and commenced a typical programme (for the time) of a mixture of vaudeville turns and films[222]. In true entrepreneurial style, they started their new operation before the Paddington Council had approved the venture. When challenged by the Council in July, Teasdale submitted a belated request for approval, but he retorted that he had the approval of the Chief Secretary, and felt sure (without actually asking, obviously) that the Council would have no objections either, so he erected the tent. Going further on the defensive, he stated that he had observed a canvas tent or roof in nearly every suburb in Sydney, including in the Council's area, so there must be some authority to allow the regulation (which was that the Council did not normally approve canvas structures for public entertainments) to be overridden[223]. Teasdale was ordered to take down the tent, but news reports showed that the tent theatre continued operating[224].

A permanent theatre

In any case, a permanent theatre was constructed in 1912, and was officially opened by Alderman Pointing, the Mayor of Paddington, on 16 October 1912 with a programme of vaudeville acts and moving pictures. The Newtown Highland Pipers' Band supplied the overture and rendered a number of selections on the pipes[225]. About £2,000 was spent on renovations to improve and decorate the premises. A sliding roof enabled the theatre to be kept cool in summer, making it well suited for the requirements of large crowds in sultry and warm weather[226].

It was partly open-air with galvanised iron walls and a roof, set on a dirt floor. Some of this structure may have been left by the previous coachbuilders. The theatre was located on the corner of Newcombe and Gordon Streets with the rear wall in Newcombe Street. The auditorium was parallel to Oxford Street, so two shops in Oxford Street were acquired to form a new entrance to the front of the theatre from Oxford Street, thus giving it the address 381-383 Oxford Street. It was called Teasdale and Blackmore's Picture Show in *Sands Directories* from 1912 to 1924[227].

Figure 41 Oxford Theatre entrance in Oxford Street, 1960s

Because of their large capacity, picture theatres were often in demand by organisations running benefit evenings. One such event was held at the Oxford Theatre by the Christian Brothers' Bursary Trust Fund, with a programme of pictures interspersed with songs and humorous recitations. The Christian Brothers' Paddington School choir sang *Toreador* and *Alexander's Rag Time Band*[228].

Figure 42 Oxford Theatre letterhead

On 21 May 1918, brothers Alfred and Herbert Humphrey sub-leased the theatre and commenced their long operation there. In 1919, the brothers applied for permission to form a new entrance from Newcombe Street and to close off the Oxford Street entrance. But this modification did not proceed,

possibly because they intended to demolish and rebuild altogether, for an estimated cost of £10,000[229].

The brothers announced that they planned to rebuild the theatre, and submitted a sketch of the proposed alterations to the old building in November 1920. Their idea was to have the entrance in Newcombe Street, but the Chief Secretary's office pointed out that the 16-foot-wide lane to the entrance at the back was too narrow for the expected capacity of 1,450 patrons. Then in 1921, a new plan was submitted to the Chief Secretary with the entrance via a wider 27-foot walkway from Oxford Street, to seat 1,930 patrons. But in 1922, Alfred Humphrey notified the Chief Secretary that for financial reasons he was not ready to undertake rebuilding operations. As the theatre was in a dilapidated condition, he was given six months to carry out repairs, such as alterations to the operating box and extra fire extinguishers.

Another theatre emerges

Work commenced on the new theatre in 1925, and all work was carried out while the old theatre was still operating. The new building was constructed around the old theatre, and as each section was completed, the old structures were removed. The new theatre was a brick building with an iron roof, plaster ceilings and wooden floors, completed in 1925. A large stage was erected to cater for vaudeville acts as well as for moving pictures. Lighting was provided by hanging glass shaded chandeliers. The theatre was very large, with a final capacity of 2,200 patrons. It was renamed the Oxford Theatre, and that name was formed in large cement letters across the top of the shop at 383 Oxford Street, next to the front entrance walkway that led to the theatre. Like many suburban theatres, the Oxford's programme consisted of second-release films. Each performance consisted of two feature films with a vaudeville act in between.

William Gray, writing in the *Kino* cinema magazine, first attended the Oxford in the 1940s, but preferred the more comfortable Bondi Junctions theatres. He thought the Oxford was a huge barn of a place, the interior was still in its original form and the seating was original and very uncomfortable. In summer, the heat was intense and in winter it was very cold[230]. Vaudeville acts were discontinued during the early World War II years. Then in 1946, four gaslight heaters were installed. In May 1955, the theatre was equipped for Cinemascope and wide screen presentations. But despite the attraction of widescreen movies, the Oxford could not survive the advent of television, and closed on 27 November 1959[231].

Life after movies

In 1960, the descendants of the Watson family decided to get rid of the property, and they offered to sell it to the Sydney City Council for use as council flats. The Council considered a plan to erect a 10-storey block of 60 flats where the theatre was located, and possibly another 10-storey block of flats if they could acquire all the adjacent shops fronting Oxford Street. But the decision was deferred, and in the end the Council decided to take no action[232]. The theatre stood idle for a time, and was then subdivided into two lots in 1966. In 1967, the Overseas Telecommunications Commission (OTC) purchased the laneway (Lot 1) at the side of the theatre and also the section comprising the lobby and entrance in Oxford Street.

The auditorium (Lot 2) became a bulk store for A. G. Campbell Pty Ltd, grocery wholesalers, who then purchased it in July 1970. In 1981, OTC acquired Lot 2 from A. G. Campbell and in July 1982, the theatre was demolished to make way for an office tower for OTC, which became Telstra Corporation Limited in 1992. But only the laneway to Oxford Street was built upon, and the main part of the land was never developed. The Uniting Church of Australia Property Trust (NSW) acquired it in November 1992, and used as their car park[233]. Today the site contains a block of apartments called The Gordon.

Palace Verona Cinema, 17 Oxford Street

Industrial equipment in Verona Street

In 1946, Industrial Equipment Pty Ltd commenced operations in a new building on the corner of Oxford and Verona Streets[234]. This firm had been operating at 171 William Street Darlinghurst, on the corner of Forbes Street, but had to vacate the building in 1946 to allow ABC Radio to expand its studios from the nearby building. The company was still operating from this site in 1962[235].

The Palace cinema empire begins in Melbourne

Antonio Zeccola was the founder and owner of Palace Cinemas. Arriving as an Italian migrant in Melbourne in 1957, by the mid-1960s he was renting a hall in suburban Noble Park to screen films to small but enthusiastic audiences, mostly other Italian migrants who kept in touch with their homeland and culture via the screen. By 1975, he was operating his own makeshift cinema full-time. Then in 1976, he took over the Palace Cinema in Bourke Street. This gave his budding cinema empire its name. He took over two more Melbourne cinemas before making his first foray into Sydney.

The Palace chain, now Australia's largest independent cinema group, quickly became known for its often historic and heritage buildings. Their old world charm, with fully licensed bars and good quality coffee create a great sense of occasion about seeing a long-awaited film at these venues. Palace cinemas are even famous for their healthier popcorn, popped with olive oil rather than the less healthy alternatives found in most movie houses[236].

The Palace chain expands to Sydney

In 1995, the industrial warehouse on the corner of Oxford and Verona Streets was converted into a four-screen cinema and opened as the Palace Verona to show mainly arthouse, quality commercial, documentary or edgy independent films. This was the second Palace-owned cinema in Oxford Street after the Chauvel in the Paddington Town Hall. By the end of the 1990s, Palace had also taken over the nearby Academy Twin Cinema in the old Olympia Theatre building. Palace maintained three arthouse cinemas in the same street by carefully managing the programming so that the venues complemented each other.

Figure 43 Verona Cinema

When the Academy Twin cinema closed in 2010 after a failure to agree on rent with the owners, Palace intended to expand the Verona to seven screens. However, this did not go ahead at the time. Then in December 2015, Palace managing director Benjamin Zeccola announced that he would redevelop the building at an expected cost of $4 million to add five new screens to the existing four. He said the new theatres would be small at 50 to 60 seats each, and would use space previously used as a clothing store on the ground floor and at the rear of the building[237].

Mr. Zeccola was encouraged by the recent success in expanding the Palace Norton Street cinema from four to eight screens. He hoped that the extra screens would allow Palace to give Australian films longer runs when they were doing well. The Verona, like other Palace cinemas, has made a success of catering to an audience that wants to watch quality films in venues that boast a high standard of facilities.

The nameless cinemas of Paddington

In the early rush to open picture theatres, entrepreneurs quickly put up structures that were temporary, open to the elements, and often short-lived. Three such venues appeared in Paddington from about 1910, and were known only by the name of the entrepreneur, or their location.

Wiseman Cinema, Glenmore Road and Brown Streets

Tim Wiseman had an open air theatre on the corner of Glenmore and Brown Streets, which later became the site of the Nurses' Quarters for the Royal Hospital for Women. It is not known when this theatre opened, but it was before he built the Five Ways Theatre in 1914[238].

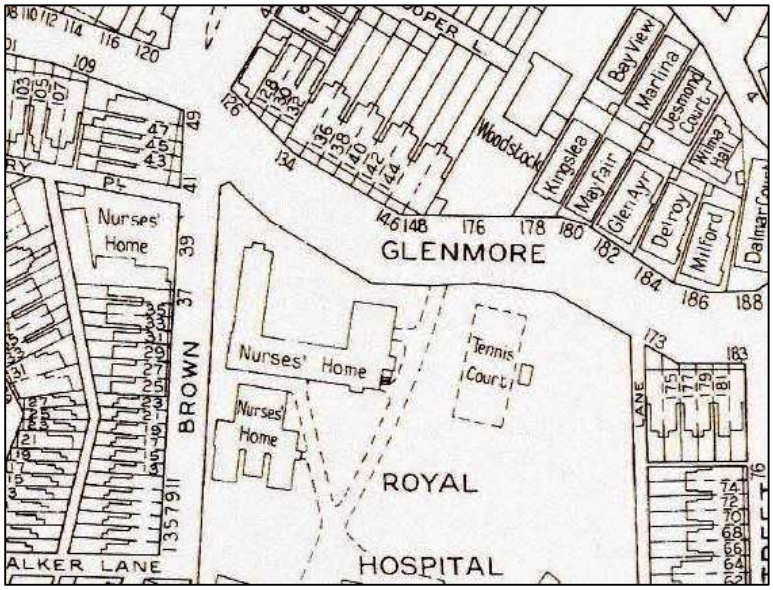


Figure 44 Wiseman Cinema site in Nurses' Home, left of Brown St

Open-air Cinema, Sutherland and Gurner Streets

This was the first open-air picture show in Paddington at the top of Sutherland St on the site of Sydney Omnibus Stables. In 1909, it moved around the corner into Gurner Street bus stables, which were roofed over[239].

Moody's Pictures, Hampden Street and Glenmore Road

This picture theatre was opened in November 1911 by Mr. Moody on vacant land behind Hill, Dickinson and Magill's factory[240].

Redfern

Coronation Picture Theatre, Crown and Cleveland Streets

An air-conditioned picture theatre

The Coronation Picture Theatre was opened by October 1911, with Francis Joseph as the proprietor. The building had a sliding roof to make it as cool as possible on hot summer nights[241] and there was an electric organ to accompany the films[242].

Figure 45 Coronation Picture Theatre

Dangerous wiring closes the theatre

In September 1927, disaster struck the Coronation when the 15-year-old assistant operator Keith Morrison climbed into the projection room, picked up a screwdriver and proceeded to repair the electrical wire. He received an electrical shock that threw him across the room and killed him[243]. An inspection of the wiring was made by Alphonsus Rogers, chief installation inspector for the Sydney City Council. He reported to the inquiry into the accident that 41 light points had been connected without authority and in an unworkmanlike manner. He recommended that the electricity supply be cut off by the Council. This was done, and the theatre subsequently closed[244]. The dead boy's parents were awarded £234 by the Workers' Compensation Commission for their loss.

The property was purchased in 1928 by Wunderlich Limited, the metal ceiling manufacturers[245]. Today it is part of the Surry Hills Shopping Village.

Empire Picture Theatre, 303 Cleveland Street

Swimming in summer, skating in winter

The building was constructed on vacant land[246] late in 1887 in the Federation Free Classical style[247]. It was opened as the Redfern Swimming Baths for the summer season November by George Raffan, the proprietor.

Figure 46 George Raffan

George Raffan (1853-1915) was born in Scotland and migrated to NSW in 1874. He started business as a building contractor, and within five years was one of the leading contractors in Sydney. An enthusiastic lawn bowler, he served as president of the NSW Bowling Association and was a leading member of the Randwick Bowling Club. Also well-known as a pastoralist, he was the owner of the Lue (8,057 acres) and Cooyal (7,058 acres) stations in the Mudgee district. On his death in December 1915, the net value of his estate was £102,100, including real estate valued at £57,309.

A newspaper reported that "the building is beautifully fitted up (although not at present completed), and has apartments for nearly 100 bathers"[248]. It seemed that the unfinished state of the pool led to a fatality the next month, as a man named James O'Connor who could not swim jumped into the water and was immediately in difficulties. His friends were poor swimmers and could not save him from drowning. A Coroner's inquest recommended that a scale showing the depth of water be displayed conspicuously at various places in the pool. The drowned man evidently did not realise how deep the water was at the point where he jumped in. The proprietor, Mr. Raffan said he would carry this out[249]. At the end of the summer, the swimming baths was converted to the Palace Skating Rink and opened in March 1888 for the winter season[250]. Alexander Peel was the manager.

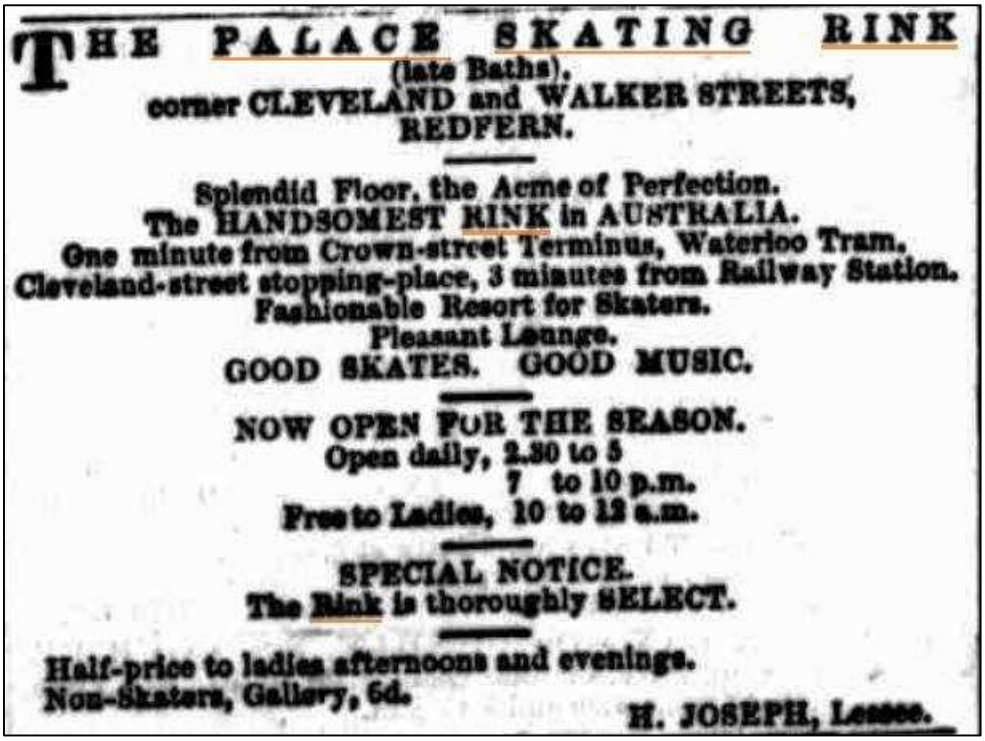


Figure 47 Palace Skating Rink opening advertisement, 1888

The skating rink operated in the cooler months, opening in March or April each year[251]. By this time, roller skating had become a popular winter sport, and some of the larger buildings were used for swimming in summer and skating in winter. For example, the premises at 400 Pitt Street operated as the Sydney Bathing Company in summer and the Paragon Skating Rink in winter. Each April, a floor was laid over the basin of the baths, giving a large skating rink of 135 feet by 60 feet. The walls surrounding the skating floor were bright with mirrors, and Chinese lanterns in a variety of colours were suspended from overhead. The Coldstream Brass Band played a popular programme of music throughout the evening[252].

Other skating rinks in the area were Her Majesty's Skating Rink (Newtown), Elite Skating Rink (Bedford and Elizabeth Streets), Crystal Palace Skating Academy (York Street), and the Metropolitan Skating Rink (Harris Street, Ultimo)[253]. It is likely that the floor of the Palace Skating Rink was simply laid over the existing swimming pool, because in 1891 the premises reverted to the Redfern Swimming Baths, opening in October for the summer season[254].

In September 1898, the proprietor George Raffan advertised for tenders to lease the swimming baths for the coming summer season[255]. The next year, the New Zealand swimming instructor Professor Joseph G. Pannell visited Sydney with his wife, with the intention of residing there. He was an enthusiastic amateur swimmer in England, holding high honours, especially in long distance swimming[256]. He leased the baths in October that year, and advertised classes for the tuition of swimming for both sexes[257]. By then it was called the St George's Baths.

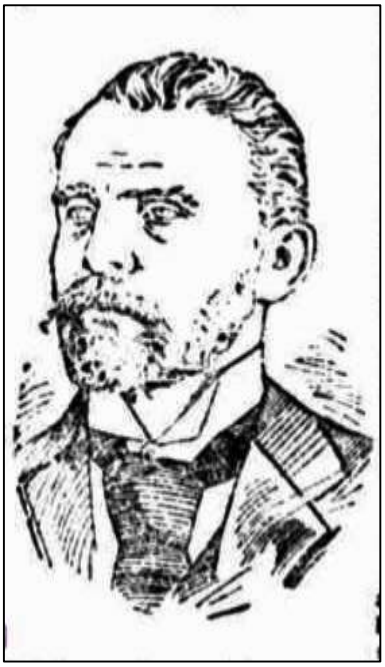


Figure 48 Professor Joseph Pannell, 1899

During the summer of 1899-1900, the Redfern Swimming Club was formed at the baths to promote local swimming competition[258]. In November the Enterprise Club held a swimming competition at which Professor Pannell gave a demonstration of fancy, trick and underwater swimming, to the enthusiastic applause of those present[259]. However, it seemed that the swimming baths were not a success for much longer, as the Redfern Swimming Club was using Farmer's Baths in the Domain for their meetings for the 1900-1901 season[260]. By 1902, Professor Pannell had moved to the swimming baths at Nicholson Street Balmain[261].

Shoemakers and printers

By 1903, the building was converted for factory use, and was occupied by Frank Petchell & Co, boot manufacturers until 1917[262]. In 1917, the building was sold to the Eclipse Printing Co[263], who converted it for their use. By October 1918, the Eclipse Printing Company had moved from 52-54 Bay Street near Grace Brothers[264] to 209 Cleveland Street[265]. Then in 1921, the company was taken over by Lamson Paragon Printing Ltd and continued operating under this name until 1923[266].

The Empire Picture Theatre

In August 1925, the new owners, the Redfern Amusement Co. Ltd, converted the building into a picture theatre[267]. It opened in October 1925, seating 961 patrons[268]. By 1927, the building was operating as the Empire Picture Theatre[269]. Then in 1933, the theatre was purchased by George Harold Towart, a showman from Enfield[270].

Figure 49 Empire Picture Theatre building, Redfern

In 1936, the façade of the building was remodelled[271]. The remodelling was done in a stylised post-modern interpretation of Art Deco motifs, giving it a monumental character. However, the rear of the building fronting James Street remains in the original Federation Free Classical style[272]. Sir Nicholas Shehadie, a former Lord Mayor of Sydney, remembers that when he was a schoolboy in Redfern in the 1930s, Empire Day (May 24th, the date of Queen Victoria's birth) was celebrated with a march to the Empire Theatre, where *Land of Hope and Glory* and *God Save the King* were sung, followed by a fireworks display at night.

The Empire Theatre showed films from the better production houses. It was the only good quality theatre in the area, and compared favourably with the Lawson Picture Theatre in Redfern[273]. The picture theatre operated until 1961.

The Stage Club

In 1961, the building was purchased by the Australian Stage and Society Club. Prior to purchase, in 1960, the Club applied to Council to convert it into an artists' club[274]. The proposed use was as artists' clubrooms for meetings, rehearsals, and teaching, with a library, showrooms, snack bar and for general promotion of the club. It operated as The Stage Club.

Newtown Rules Club

From 1977, the Newtown Rules Club operated a licensed club from the building[275]. The football club's fund-raising activities were run from these premises. In 1978, the NSWAFL moved from its premises in Regent Street to the top floor of 303 Cleveland Street, above the Newtown Rules Club. By 1987, the building was converted for use as an agency and various studios[276].

Lawson Picture Theatre, Lawson Square, south side

William Dunk moves across the road

In December 1924, the architect Henry Hodges submitted a set of working drawings to the Chief Secretary's Department for a proposed picture theatre on the south side of Lawson Square Redfern, on the corner with Gibbons Street, to seat 2,083 patrons[277]. (SR NSW T3340). The owner was William Dunk and the manager was Albert Dalwood. The theatre finally opened in February 1926[278]. William Dunk had been operating the Lawson Picture Palace in the north side of Lawson Square since 1910.

Figure 50 Lawson Picture Theatre, 1942

In December 1931 the theatre held the premiere of Norman Dawn's *Showgirl's Luck*, the first locally-produced "All Talking, All Singing" extravaganza. It received poor reviews and criticism for the primitive sound on disc system. The Lawson Theatre ran as a typical neighbourhood cinema offering double bills of action movies with Saturday cartoons and serials for children[279]. Redfern was a tough area in the 1930s, and there were many stories in the press of disturbances and assaults inside and around the theatre during this time. The early history of the theatre also includes a series of lawsuits over payments for sound systems[280].

Disputes over the new sound equipment

The Western Electric Company took Albert Dalwood to court in 1932 to recover £1,614 as money payable for the use of sound equipment for his picture theatre[281]. The theatre closed for a few months in February 1933 following another dispute with the Western Electric Company over payment for sound equipment. It reopened in July 1933 after some renovations under the direction of Suburban Cinemas Limited[282]. By 1941, the Department of Railways owned the land on which the theatre stood, with Tooheys Limited leasing the property[283].

Figure 51 *Showgirl's Luck* poster, 1931

In 1959, Chris Louis, a Greek immigrant who had been very successful in real estate, started leasing theatres to show Greek and Italian films. He initially leased the Lawson Theatre for one night for $200 and then took out a five year lease. He also leased or owned the Olympia/Odeon in Darlinghurst, the Marina in Rosebery, the Hoyts in Enmore, the Doncaster in Kingsford, and the King's in Marrickville[284].

Sunday screening tests the law again

In January 1964, the theatre advertised that they would hold a Sunday screening, and the Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association wrote to the Chief Secretary asking that his department prevent this screening. Chris Louis told the police that the Macedonian community had hired the cinema for the day to show one film. It was titled *Esalon Doktor M*, only Macedonian people would be attending, there would be no admission charge, and only the dress circle would be used. The organiser of the event, Mr. Joannou advised police that Macedonian people were advised of the screening by letter, and only they sought admission to the theatre.

Redfern police attended the screening, and the constable reported to the Chief Secretary's Department that while it was not a religious film as required by the Act for screening on Sundays, he did not think a breach of the Act had occurred, as the film was not open to the general public and no admission charge was made[285]. So Sunday screening was still not allowed in NSW in 1964 except under limited conditions, and no real progress had been made since the King's Cross Newsreel Theatrette's pioneering attempts in 1951.

The theatre continued showing films until January 1972, and the building was demolished in April 1972[286]. Thomas National Transport built twin towers which cover the entire south side of Lawson Square, opening in 1975.

Redfern Picture Palace Cinema, Lawson Square, north side

William Dunk opens a Picture Palace

The Redfern Picture Palace opened in Jun 1910 with a mixture of moving pictures and illustrated songs accompanied by an orchestra, managed by William Dunk[287]. The theatre's programming style was outlined in a newspaper article soon afterwards. Cowboy films featured prominently, with illustrated songs performed by Miss Millie Bertolo and the orchestra. On Sundays, a concert with Biblical and other moving pictures was shown[288]. Though not allowed under the Theatres and Public Halls Act of 1908, Sunday screenings must have been condoned for a time, although it was at least the 1960s before they were officially allowed. The orchestra had four members, who complained in court that William Dunk had not paid them as contracted[289].

Boxing films in Redfern

There must have been quite an appetite for boxing in Redfern, because the theatre screened films of two boxing matches in 1910. In August, the Johnson-Ketchel fight was shown. This was a famous bout in 16 October 1909 between the heavyweight Jack Johnson (The Galveston Giant) and the middleweight Stan Ketchel (The Michigan Assassin). The much taller and heavier Johnson won with a knockout in the twelfth round[290].

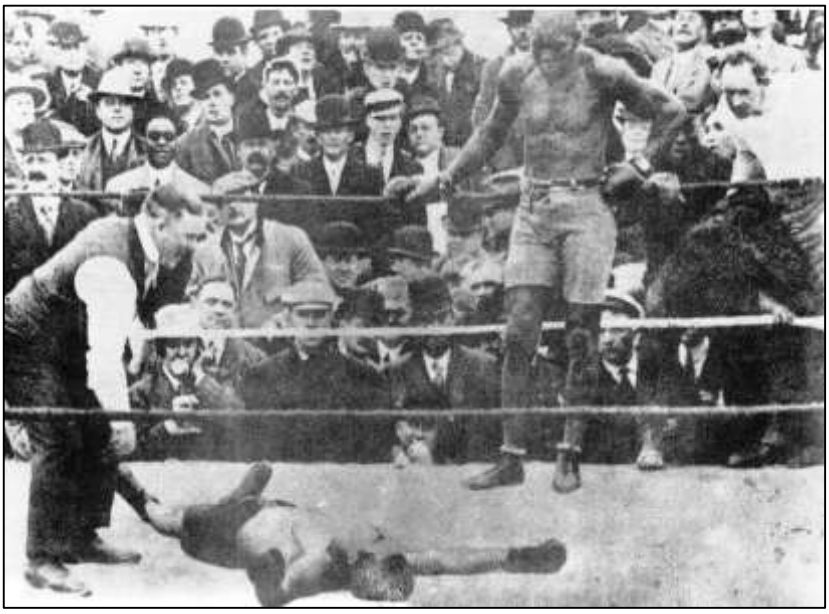


Figure 52 Johnson-Ketchel fight, 1909

The next month, the Jeffries-Sharkey fight was shown[291]. This fight was held on 3 November 1899 in Coney Island between Jim Jeffries and Tom Sharkey. Boilermaker Jim was 6'2" and 215 lbs., and Sailor Tom was 5'8" and 183 lbs. After a brutal fight in which Sharkey suffered two broken ribs, Jeffries won on points after 25 rounds. The fight was filmed under 400 arc lamps, generating colossal heat which singed the boxers' scalps[292]. In 1916, William Dunk advertised the theatre for sale or lease[293], but it continued operating.

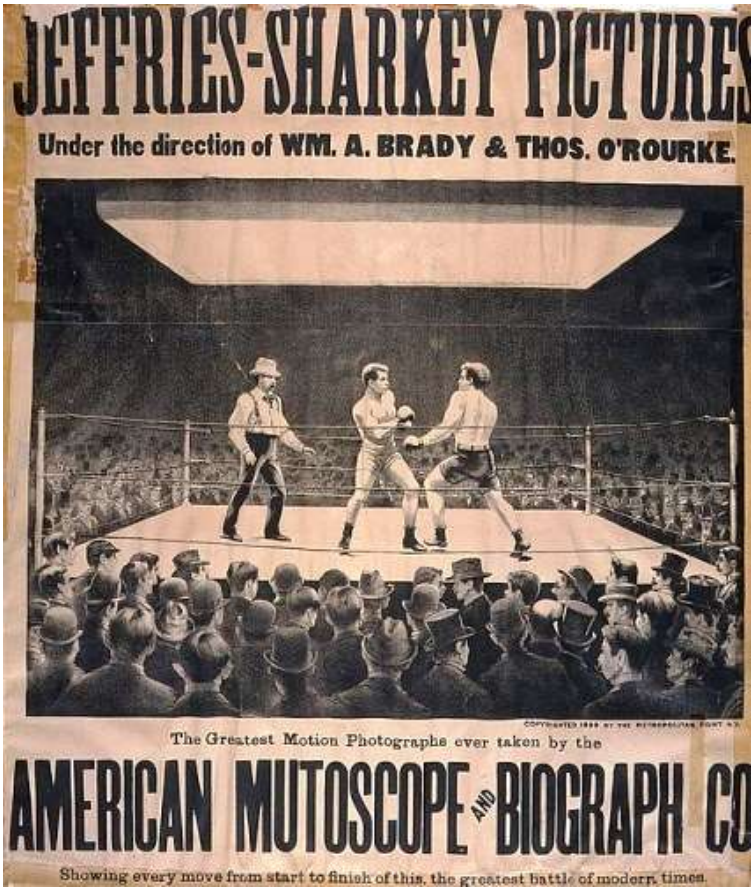


Figure 53 Jeffries-Sharkey fight, movie poster

Poisonous lolly water and arson

In 1920, a bizarre accident was reported at the theatre involving 18 year old Mary Williams. She was sitting with some friends one night when she pulled out a bottle from her bag and took a drink. But instead of the bottle of lolly water she brought with her, she accidentally drank from a bottle of poison she was also carrying at the time. She was rushed to hospital in a critical condition[294].

In January 1925, the building was severely damaged by a fire at about 2:30 one morning. When the fire brigade arrived, the rear of the theatre was well alight. At an inquiry into the fire, Captain Davies of the Redfern Fire Brigade said that there was kerosene in the band instruments, the stage was saturated and the organ was covered with it. The brothers Alfred and Victor Gartrell testified that they had run the theatre for five years, and it was always a paying concern. Their regular takings were £80 per week, and they were not in financial difficulties. The coroner concluded that the fire had been deliberately lit[295].

Victor Gartrell admitted that he had a financial interest in the new theatre being planned across the road, where he was to be employed as manager. The brothers claimed there were only small quantities of kerosene kept on the premises, and could not account for the fire[296]. In February 1926, the two Biograph machines, opera chairs and a piano were advertised for sale[297]. This must have signalled the end of the building as a venue for showing films.

Boxing or billiards

In May 1926, Len Butler, who recently had a gymnasium in nearby Regent Street, was granted a licence to promote boxing events at the theatre[298]. In 1927, the theatre was advertised to let as being suitable for a billiard saloon at low rent[299]. Then in 1930, boxing promoters John Daunt and Frank Bush were given permission to hold boxing matches in the theatre[300].

In November 1933, William Dunk planned to resume the exhibition of moving pictures in the theatre. The Chief Secretary's Department Architect inspected the premises and sent Mr. Dunk a long list of items requiring attention before the theatre could reopen. However, by July 1934, the police reported that the theatre had been closed for a month, although Mr. Dunk was considering putting in a new floor and converting the premises into a dancing academy[301].

The Pentecostal Church holds services

From February 1936, the theatre was used as a Pentecostal Church. In October 1945, William Dunk's daughter May Mary Ann Dunk wrote to the Chief Secretary asking for the theatre's licence to be transferred to her name, as executor of her late father's estate. The Pentecostal Church continued to hold services in the old theatre until November 1951. Ownership of the building was then transferred to the wholesale grocery firm Henry Lewis & Sons Limited. John Lewis of this company informed the Chief Secretary that the company would be using the building as a warehouse to store groceries, and that he no longer wanted it licensed under the Theatres and Public Halls Act[302]. By 1982, the theatre had been demolished and two commercial type buildings were erected.

Regent Music Hall, 26 Regent Street

A cinema not a music hall

This building with the misleading name Regent Music Hall opened as a picture theatre in June 1907[303] on the west side of Regent Street Redfern, between Cleveland Street and Wells Street West (now Lawson Square). It was located north of George Hudson's large timber yard[304]. No details are known of the seating capacity or the people who operated the theatre. The theatre began by advertising screenings every Saturday night[305], but a week later was showing films every night[306].

In its Monday night summaries of the weekend's amusements, the *Evening News* regularly reported that there was very good attendance at the theatre[307]. At the start of July 1907, the set of films being screened included *Life of Napoleon*, *Attempted Suicide*, *A Desperate Girl* and many more. They would all have been a single reel in length – about ten minutes. Later in July, the main advertised film was *Dick Turpin and the Death of Bonny Black Bess*[308]. The theatre stopped advertising in August 1907[309].

The theatre closed three years later in 1910 and the Biograph plant and other equipment was advertised for sale[310]. It is not clear why this picture theatre was called the Regent Music Hall. These were the very early days of the movies, and it was possible the owners originally planned to put on live music hall acts, but were impressed by the popularity of the new-fangled moving pictures that were starting to attract large audiences and so started with films. In any event, the theatre only operated for three years then closed and disappeared without a trace.

Royal Star Picture Theatre, 155-157 George Street

The Wiseman brothers expand their cinema empire

In 1911, the entrepreneurial brothers W. R. and J. Wiseman built the Royal Star Picture Theatre on a vacant block 70 feet by 90 feet at 155-157 George Street Redfern, south of Albert Street[311]. They also operated the Surry Picture Palace at 455-459 Bourke Street in Surry Hills between 1910 and 1915, and the open-air picture theatre on the corner of Glenmore and Brown Streets in Paddington before 1914.

The first mention of the theatre in the press was in April, advertising the first film adaptation of the popular story *Uncle Tom's Cabin* ("Country visitors: don't miss this glorious Vitagraph production")[312]. Film serials were very popular at the time, and in May 1915 the Royal Star hosted the first and second episodes of *The Million Dollar Mystery*[313]. This was a 1914 serial in 22 parts, with the gimmick that the 23rd and final episode was unwritten when the film was first released. A prize of $10,000 was offered by the *Chicago Tribune* for the best suggestion for a conclusion of the story. Then in September 1915, the first instalment of the damsel-in-distress melodrama *The Perils of Pauline* was shown at the Royal Star Pictures, Redfern[314].

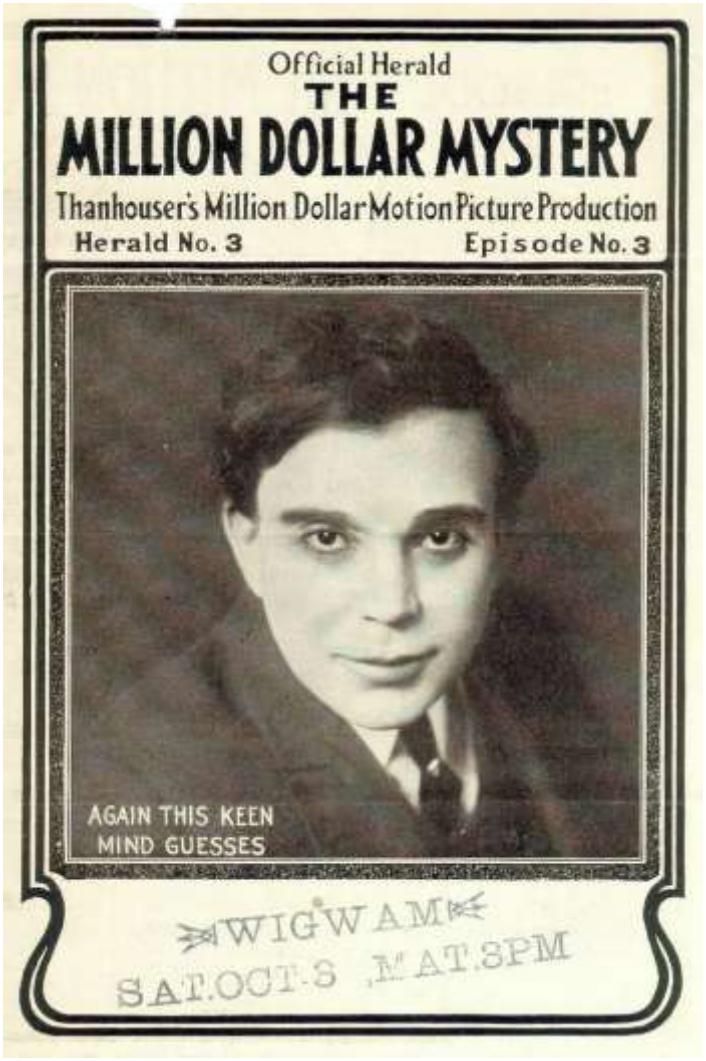


Figure 54 ***The Million Dollar Mystery*****, Episode 3, 1914**

While other early cinemas in Redfern had their share of crowd trouble, in September 1918 the Royal Star was the scene of a brawl between two gangs inside the theatre, which continued outside and only concluded when a nineteen-year-old youth was shot in the groin[315]. The Wiseman brothers' response was to advertise for a "man to keep order"[316]. But bouncers must have been hard to find, as they were still advertising for one a couple of months later[317].

Novice boxing tournaments

By 1921, the Royal Star was following the trend in other Redfern cinemas by holding boxing matches twice a week while films were screened on other nights[318]. Over the next few years, a number of tournaments were staged for novice boxers on Tuesday and Friday nights, lasting for several weeks of elimination rounds and culminating in a grand final. When one tournament ended, another one started soon afterwards[319].

Figure 55 *Boomerang Bill* poster, 1922

The Royal Star must have had access to first-release Paramount films, as the theatre took part in the annual Paramount Week festivals from 1921 onwards. The second Paramount Week in 1922 featured the crime melodrama *Boomerang Bill*, starring the veteran actor Lionel Barrymore (1878-

1954)[320]. The theatre took part in the fifth Paramount Week in 1925, not long before it closed[321]. At the end of the lease in 1926, the owners decided to sell the Royal Star for demolition and redevelopment of the site. It was advertised as "a large galvanised iron Picture Show, 90 x 70 approximately"[322].

British trucks and French cars

By 1931, the British company Leyland Motors Limited had built a warehouse on an expanded site at 153-167 George Street. The site was used as a truck assembly plant and for the sale of second-hand trucks[323]. Trucks on sale ranged from the 2-ton Cub up to the formidable 12-ton Hippo[324].

From July 1960, the building served as the administration and spare parts section for Renault Australia Ltd[325] until the company moved its operations to Melbourne in 1973. After this, it was a workshop for the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, then as a packaging facility for the Prestige Packing Company. In 2014, the four-storey apartment block known as The George was opened, retaining the exterior of the 1930s building.

Few details are known about this picture theatre, such as its seating capacity, although it managed to survive much longer than the Wiseman brothers' Surry Picture Theatre, which closed in 1915. George Street is a main street in the heart of the city, but its southern extension through Redfern runs through an industrial area. It is not clear why it closed during the boom in cinema popularity in the 1920s, but crowd problems and a move to part-time boxing tournaments suggests that a picture theatre on a back street must have struggled for an audience, despite the first-release films available to it.

Crown Star No. 1 Picture Theatre, 460 Crown Street

A bottle yard or a cinema

In 1911, George Edward Blackmore was the owner of a bottle yard on the corner of Crown, Collins and Norton Streets, the site of the present Surry Hills Library[326]. He was also a co-owner of the nearby Crown Star No. 2 Picture Theatre at 496-512 Crown Street. He submitted plans to the City Council for an open air theatre on his bottle shop site. These were approved by the Council in June 1911, but a cinema was never built there.

The Crown Star overflow cinema

In May 1911, Augustus P. Lett of the Australia Photo Play Company applied to the City Council for permission to erect an open-air picture theatre on land fronting Crown Street between Foveaux and Collins Streets, with Collins Lane behind. This land had been owned by Thomas Burdekin and his descendants since the carve-up of the Riley Estate in 1845. George Maisey was a fuel merchant who operated a wood and coal business at the Collins Street end of the block and a livery stable operated at the Foveaux Street end. The middle section was the only undeveloped part of the land, so the theatre must have been built there.

Figure 56 Crown Star letterhead (note canvas roof), 1912

The main body of the theatre would seat 964 patrons, and two galleries would seat 250 each. The City Building Surveyor commented in a memo that the Council may decide not to approve further Picture Shows within the city. He mentioned two cases in Darlinghurst and Camperdown where tents were erected over the whole area of the theatre, essentially forming a canvas and timber building, which he thought was undesirable[327].

This cinema was built as an overflow venue for the Crown Star No. 2 Picture Theatre, two blocks along Crown Street on the corner of Arthur Street. It was actually a larger venue, compared with 1,000 seats at the Crown Star No. 2. But things did not go well with the management of the overflow

theatre. George Maisey, on whose land the theatre operated, sued the company directors Victor Teasdale and Frederick Ogden in October 1913 over non-payment of 200 shares in the company (which was about to be floated) after the sale of some picture show equipment that Maisey had sold to the others.

Life after the overflow

The theatre only operated for a few years, and the company went into voluntary liquidation in June 1914[328]. Later in the same year the entire site from Foveaux Street to Collins Street was resumed by the Public Works Department for more than £10,000, with a plan to build a Workers' Institute, but this idea never proceeded. Samuel Maisey continued to operate his wood and coal business at the Collins Street end of the site until 1919, when he committed suicide after suffering ill health for some years[329].

In 1937, the Parks and Playgrounds Movement persuaded the State Government to hand the site over to the Sydney City Council for development as a park. Shannon Reserve was opened on the site in August 1939 and remains there today. Thomas Shannon, ALP councillor and Member of the Legislative Assembly, spoke at the opening of his eponymous park.

Crown Star No. 2 Picture Theatre, 496-512 Crown Street

An open-air theatre in Crown Street

The block of land to the east of Crown Street Surry Hills between Arthur and Rainford Streets was owned by the estate of John Baptist in 1907 and purchased by Elizabeth Kinsela by 1911[330]. Part of this land was occupied by Bennett & Douglas Farriers in 1910[331]. In 1910, an open air picture theatre was erected on the whole block, with 15 foot high galvanised walls on the front and sides, and a 9 foot iron wall on the rear lane. The movable seating was for 1,000 patrons, and a fireproof projection box was located just behind the last row[332].

Figure 57 Crown Star No. 2 Picture Theatre, 1927 (Sydney Council Demolition Books)

In July 1911, the owners, Messrs. Teasdale, Blackmore and McMahon requested permission from the City Council to erect a canvas marquee as a temporary protection against the cold nights, adding that the Chief Secretary has given his permission (subject to Council not objecting). However, the City Architect pointed out that Council had never given permission for these temporary covers over entertainment areas where there is any risk of fire or panic, and he didn't recommend it in this case. The Town Clerk notified Victor Teasdale that the Council could not approve the cover. However, the owners erected a canvas roof anyway[333].

In July 1912, the owners applied to Council to erect a permanent roof made of malthoid over the picture theatre, and to replace the iron wall on Crown Street with a brick wall, as this would improve the building. This was approved, but Council correspondence showed that they saw this as only a temporary structure[334]. The theatre continued to operate until 1925, when a fire late at night caused considerable damage[335]. The owners must have decided to close the theatre after this, as the fittings, furniture and effects of the theatre were put up to auction soon afterwards[336].

In April 1926, there was a newspaper advertisement directed to manufacturers, motor engineers, body builders and others that the old Crown Star Theatre was eminently suitable for conversion into a factory or motor vehicle service station[337]. By August 1927, the building was being demolished[338].

Condensed milk and tennis racquets

The Kinsela family continued to own the land until 1927 or 1928 when it was sold to the Nestle & Anglo Swiss Condensed Milk Co. (Australasia) Limited, who converted it into a factory with offices and a garage[339]. In 1929, Slazengers (Aust.) Ltd leased part of the building, and converted it to offices for their use. But the most serious Sydney fire of 1932 occurred there on New Year's Eve, and the company apparently ceased operation afterwards[340]. In 1978, Simon's Carpets Pty Ltd was using part of the building as a carpet showroom. In 1979, Vendomatic Pty Ltd started using the rest as a warehouse for electrical goods, jewellery and travel goods.

In the early 2000s, the colourful businessman Abe Saffron (1919-2006) owned the building and was using part of it as his office[341]. In 2001, he applied for a liquor licence to open Crown Street Wholesale Liquor Supply Pty Ltd in the building. The Licensing Court of NSW deemed him an unsuitable person to hold a liquor licence due to numerous undeclared breaches of the Licensing Act in the past and the application was refused[342]. Between 2002 and 2005, the warehouse was entirely rebuilt with commercial shops on the ground floor and two levels of apartments above[343].

Encore/Third Eye Cinema, 64 Devonshire Street

Jigs and reels give way to independent movies

After demolition of the existing terrace houses in 1953, the building at 64 Devonshire Street Surry Hills was erected in 1957 by the Irish National Association of Australasia (INA) as a hall to service the Irish community in Sydney. In 1987, Robert Johnson leased the ground floor dance hall and started the Encore Cinema with one screen and 215 seats, showing classic, foreign, documentary and independent films, including some films in 3D.

Figure 58 Encore Cinema banner

Robert Johnson was born in 1927 in Richmond, Melbourne. A film fanatic from early childhood, he became an apprentice projectionist in St Kilda, and subsequently worked at cinemas in Brunswick and Camberwell. He moved to Sydney because it was the port of entry for most overseas films[344]. The Encore screened an amazing variety of films, covering almost every genre. One daily programme in 1988 illustrates the broad range of films:

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1941)
Lord of the Rings (1978)
Mein Kampf (1960)
Nazi Propaganda movies (1930s)
42nd Street (1933)
The Boys in the Band (1970)
Gold Diggers of 1937 (1936)
Siddhartha (1972)
The Guru (1969)[345]

The cinema occasionally provided extra atmosphere for the patrons. For example, in 1988 a group of performers known as Senza Tempo ("timeless") livened up the screening of the 1921 vampire classic *Nosferatu* with special effects including fog, coffins and complimentary blood cocktails. In the weeks following this, the group dreamed up thematic presentations to other classic films at the cinema[346].

Figure 59 Encore Cinema programme advertisement

Sydney Morning Herald advertisements in 1996 called it the Third Eye Cinema, so the name was apparently changed around this time. The cinema closed in May 1999[347], probably on the death of its founder, Robert Johnson. His large collection of movie posters and other memorabilia was auctioned as part of his estate in 2002, and some of the items were acquired by the Powerhouse Museum[348].

Irish music fills the building again

When the cinema closed, the INA took back control of the ground floor and renovated it, extending the Gaelic Club to two floors. Then in 2006, the ground floor was sold by the INA and reopened as the Gaelic Theatre, featuring live music. Today the ground floor is known as GT's Hotel, while the Gaelic Club continues to operate on the first floor, holding dances, concerts, meetings and other events for the Irish community.

Figure 60 The Gaelic Club, 2009

The Encore was a rare example of an independent cinema catering for a demand for films other than first-release commercial blockbusters. But there was apparently nobody willing to carry on after the death of its founder and guiding light.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 20-28 Chalmers Street

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Figure 61 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer logo

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. (MGM) was founded in 1924 when the entertainment entrepreneur Marcus Loew gained control of Metro Pictures, Goldwyn Pictures and Louis B. Mayer Pictures. Based in Beverley Hills, California, it was at one time the largest, most glamourous and most revered film studio.

Figure 62 Nothing was bigger than *Ben-Hur*, 1925

In 1925, MGM released *Ben-Hur*, a highly successful swords-and-sandals epic that was the most expensive film of the silent era. A gargantuan 200,000 feet of film was shot for the famous chariot scene, eventually edited down to 750 feet in the film. MGM was one of the first studios to experiment with Technicolour. Using the two-colour process then available, portions of films (including *Ben-Hur* in 1925) were filmed in colour. In 1928, *The Viking* was the first complete

Technicolor feature with sound (with a synchronised score and sound effects, but no speech). By 1934, Technicolour featured an improved three-colour process.

From the outset, MGM exploited the audience's need for glamour and sophistication. With few big names from their previous companies, Mayer created and publicised a host of new stars, including Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford and Norma Shearer. The arrival of talkies in the late 1920s gave opportunities to other new stars, including Cark Gable, Jean Harlow, Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn.

MGM gained a fine reputation for lavish productions that were sophisticated, polished and aimed at an urban audience. *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) were probably the best examples of their style. Despite being the last studio to convert to talkies, from the end of the silent era to the late 1950s, MGM was the dominant film studio in Hollywood. A remake of *Ben-Hur* in 1959, starring Charlton Heston in the title role, was even bigger than the original: it had the largest budget (at $15 million), ran for almost four hours, had the largest sets of any film at the time, and won a record 11 Academy Awards. It was also produced in widescreen, using 70 mm lenses known as Ultra Panavision that produced one of the widest projected images ever used for a feature film. Nothing was bigger than *Ben-Hur*.

But MGM was always slow to respond to the changing nature of the industry during the 1950s and 1960s, and the studio lost significant amounts of money throughout the 1960s. In more recent decades, MGM managed to keep in production with the lucrative James Bond film franchise. But many restructures and sell-offs of its businesses meant that MGM as an independent film studio is hardly recognisable from its heyday up to the 1950s.

A film distribution centre

The land around Chalmers Street Surry Hills was resumed under the scheme to construct Central Railway Station, which opened in 1906. The Minister for Public Works sold the Chalmers Street lots to private individuals, who then sold lots 7 to 11 (now 20-28 Chalmers Street) to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer at the beginning of 1932.

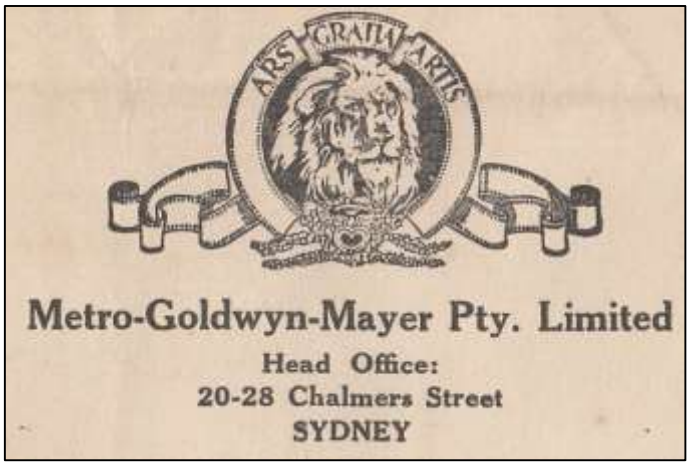


Figure 63 MGM's Australian letterhead

MGM built a centre for their operations in NSW, opening it in December 1933. The original building was three stories with a mildly Spanish Mission character, perhaps appropriate given its Hollywood

association. It is a rare example of this style in a commercial building in the city centre. Spanish Mission style was popularised as the much-publicised homes of Hollywood stars in the inter-war period. The style was intended to evoke the glamour and style of Hollywood[349]. The building contained a film despatch department on the ground floor, a sound-proof theatre seating sixty on the first floor and offices on the second floor. The roof level was devoted to staff dining and recreation areas with an open court for handball games and other pastimes.

Figure 64 MGM building, original terrazzo vestibule

After the end of World War I, the Hollywood studios began in earnest the system of exporting films through their own distributing agencies. During the 1920s, Hollywood supplied between 82% and 98% of films screened in Australian cinemas. Department of Commerce figures show that Australia headed the list of the world's importers of American films in 1922, 1926-1929, and was second in 1923 and 1925.

Louis B. Mayer stated in 1929 that with saturation point almost reached in the United States, MGM had to develop its foreign markets for future existence. The sheer size of the Hollywood production industry in the 1920s and 1930s led to world leadership in film making which producers elsewhere could not match. Competition between companies in Hollywood produced innovations in technology, business practice and finished product that was unequalled elsewhere[350].

The importance of the Australian market was demonstrated by the seniority of the MGM executive who travelled to Sydney open the building in 1933: Arthur B. Loew was vice-president of foreign distribution, and the son of company founder Marcus Loew[351]. As films were distributed throughout NSW via the railway network, the proximity to Central Station would have been an ideal location for distribution agencies.

With the decline in cinema audiences through the 1960s, MGM left Chalmers Street in 1972 and joined Paramount, Twentieth Century Fox and other distributors in a combined distribution venture called Cinema International Corporation Pty Ltd (CIC). This company operated in the Paramount Building at 53-55 Brisbane Street Surry Hills until the 1980s.

Radio broadcasting studio and dental hospital

In 1972, Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Ltd converted part of the building for use as broadcasting and recording studios and for radio training[352]. Also in 1972, part of the building was converted as an extension of the nearby dental hospital (currently operating at 2 Chalmers Street)[353].

Figure 65 MGM building in 2006

The University of Sydney erected the United Dental Hospital in 1911 in a large new building at 14 Chalmers Street. The building was enlarged in the 1930s and in the post-World War II period. Due to an increase in students in the 1970s, the University acquired 20-28 Chalmers Street as a short term and partial alleviation of the situation. By 1980, the building was operated by the Health Commission of NSW[354]. In 2006, the building was converted to a backpackers' hostel, with the addition of an extra level[355]. It is currently known as the Bounce Hostel Sydney.

Paramount Pictures/Golden Age Theatre, 53-55 Brisbane Street

Paramount Pictures Corporation

Paramount Studio's existence dates from the 1912 founding of the Famous Players Film Company in New York by the Hungarian-born Adolph Zukor (1873-1976). Zukor planned to expand the working class appeal of movies to the middle class by featuring the leading theatrical players of the time. The company's first film, *The Loves of Queen Elizabeth*, starred Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), the great French stage actress. Also in 1912, another aspiring producer, Jesse Lasky (1880-1958), started the Lasky Feature Play Company. Their first employee was a stage director with virtually no film experience named Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959).

Figure 66 Paramount Pictures logo, 1914

From 1914, both Lasky and Famous Players released their films through a start-up company called Paramount Pictures Corporation, established in Utah by the theatre owner W. W. Hodkinson. Paramount became the first successful nationwide distributor – until this time, films were sold on a state-wide or regional basis only. Because he believed in the star system, Zukor signed and developed many of the leading stars of the movies, including Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Gloria Swanson and Rudolph Valentino. In the 1920s and 1930s, Paramount used its dominance in the industry to coerce any distributor who wanted a particular star's films to buy a year's worth of other Paramount productions. This led the US government to pursue Paramount on antitrust grounds for more than twenty years. The government eventually forced the separation of the production and distribution arms of the studio.

Figure 67 Paramount Pictures Founding Fathers

The Great Depression of the early 1930s led to the near-collapse of Paramount, and in 1933 the company went into receivership. Adolph Zukor managed to survive the many changes in management over the years, and he was able to bring the studio out of bankruptcy. By the era of the talkies in the 1930s, a new generation of big stars was signed by the studio, including Marlene Dietrich, Mae West, W. C. Fields, the Marx Brothers, Bing Crosby and Gary Cooper. Paramount cartoons continued to be successful, especially *Betty Boop* and *Popeye the Sailor*.

But by the early 1960s, Paramount's future was in doubt. With the impact of television, the movie business was in trouble and its large theatre chain was long gone. In 1966, a sinking Paramount was sold to the industrial conglomerate Gulf & Western Industries Corporation. Paramount's reputation was restored with commercial successes such as *Love Story* (1970), *The Godfather* series (1972, 1974, 1990) and *Chinatown* (1974). In recent years, Paramount's successful film series have been *Mission Impossible*, *Crocodile Dundee* and *Terminator*. The studio's highest-grossing film was *Titanic*, released in 1997.

Paramount builds a film exchange

Much of the slum housing in the area of Surry Hills around Brisbane, Campbell, Commonwealth and Goulburn Streets was demolished in the great Brisbane Street Resumption, starting in 1912 but not completed until the late 1920s. But the Great Depression intervened from 1929 and for a long time the Sydney Council failed to find buyers for the cleared land.

Figure 68 Paramount House, 2013 (Simon Wood Photography)

Then in 1938, Paramount Film Services purchased three lots in the resumption area (which became 53-55 Brisbane Street, also called 78-80 Commonwealth Street), while Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation purchased the adjacent two allotments at the same time (which became 43-51 Brisbane Street)[356]. In 1940, Paramount Films constructed a building to serve as offices and a distribution centre. The NSW office was located on the ground floor, and the Australian office on the first floor. A theatrette was built in the basement where the film storage and distribution services were also located.

The building is constructed in the Inter-War Functionalist style, and remains as a fine example of the functionalist tradition that influenced architecture in the 1930s. It is significant for the use of glazed terracotta tiles in a low scale building. The three storey tile-clad building curves around the corner in a manner characteristic of the Functionalist style. The interiors are generally intact with restrained, stylised decoration typical of the Art Deco style. On the facade, the Paramount Pictures emblem is cast in glazed terracotta tile above the door[357].

Figure 69 Paramount House theatrette, World War II

There were many innovations in the internal layout of the building, such as special means to protect employees from fire, and specially constructed vaults for the storage of films. The design provided every worker in the building with access to natural light. The theatre in the new building was air-conditioned and the entire building was centrally heated[358]. The employees occupied the building in March 1941. Special emphasis was given to the theatrette in the new building: indirect light and perfect acoustics were the main features of this small theatre, which was similar to the Curzon Theatre, London[359]. While normally used to preview new films to distributors and theatre owners, the basement cinema was used during World War II for the screening of newsreels and information films for military personnel. In its time, the building has been visited by such Hollywood stars as Bob Hope and Charlton Heston[360].

Figure 70 Paramount House theatrette posters, 1945

In 1970, as a cost-cutting move prompted by declining movie-going audiences, Paramount Pictures and Universal Studios combined to form a film distribution company called Cinema International Corporation Pty Ltd (CIC) to distribute their films outside the USA and Canada[361]. This company operated in the Paramount building through the 1970s, and the basement theatrette was still used for film review purposes[362]. In the mid-1970s, CIC merged with 20th Century Fox's distribution arm to form CIC-Fox. This also included films by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Walt Disney Productions. The venture ended in 1986.

Beyond Television

In 1985, Beyond Television Productions was formed to produce the science and technology magazine programme *Beyond 2000*. This was a commercial reworking of the ABC programme *Towards 2000*, and ran on Channel 7 and then on Channel 10 until 1999. The series always rated well in Australia and was sold overseas. Beyond Television based its operations in the Paramount building[363]. After Beyond Television left in the late 1990s, there were various attempts for a number of years to convert the building into contemporary spaces. In early 2006, the chef Danny Russo opened Lo Studio, a fine dining Italian restaurant in a brightly-lit semi-circular area on the first floor[364]. But despite winning a Chef's Hat and Italian food awards, the restaurant closed after a year or two.

A Golden Age again

In 2010, a group of Melbourne entrepreneurs applied to the Sydney City Council to establish a rooftop cinema in the Paramount building. Barry, Bob and Chris Barton were the creators of Melbourne's Rooftop Cinema, and they hoped to repeat their success in Sydney, but they were frustrated by local residents' objections. They opted instead to convert the basement screening room into a 60-seat cinema with an adjoining bar. Cinema seats from the 1940s were saved from a

cinema in Switzerland just before it was pulled down and installed in the space. Two vintage projectors remained on the premises, although the new cinema uses a digital projector.

Figure 71 Golden Age Cinema, Kate Jinx and Barry Barton

The newly named Golden Age Cinema opened in August 2013 and screens both classic films and new releases. The Paramount Coffee Project operates a café on the ground floor above the cinema, and the upper floor is occupied by small businesses. The combination of movies and stylish food was inspired by overseas cinemas such as the Nitehawk in New York and Electric Cinema in London. 52 films were scheduled in the first six weeks, including just-after releases, cult pictures, documentaries, Sunday afternoon classics and Saturday matinee children's movies. To attract patrons, Tuesday night screenings are at prices from the year the film was released[365].

Figure 72 Golden Age Cinema, restored auditorium

Figure 73 Golden Age Cinema, cocktail bar

Barry Barton said that people felt that the magic had gone out of going to the cinema, and the Golden Age has brought that magic back to the community. The adjacent cocktail bar is a visual feast of velvet, brass and American walnut. Mr. Barton says he is really happy with how surreal it all feels, as you never know if you are going backwards or forwards in time. It's always good to see the surprise on people's faces when the curtain wall in the bar opens up to reveal a secret stage where a singing pianist performs before the show[366].

Premier Theatre, 525 Crown Street

The New Coronation opens as the Premier

In October 1926, Mr. S. M. Blakeney and the consulting engineer Mr. E. S. Budrodeen wrote to the Chief Secretary asking for permission to erect a picture theatre on land situated between Crown, Miles and High Holborn Streets, Surry Hills. They mention that they have purchased the business and plant of the Coronation Picture Theatre in Cleveland Street from Mr. J. S. Croll, although they wanted to continue operating the old theatre during building operations.

Figure 74 Premier Theatre, 1953

In February 1927, Mr. Budrodeen applied to the City Council to demolish the existing premises on the Crown Street land[367]. However, there is no record of any existing buildings on the land, as the *Sands Directories* and Council Rate Assessment Books show it as vacant. By August, the New Coronation Picture Theatre, Crown, Miles and High Holburn Streets, Sydney was being built[368].

It is not clear what the long term plans were for the old Coronation Theatre on Cleveland Street, but it was suddenly closed on 10 September 1927 due to a fatal electrocution and a Council inspector finding many unauthorised and faulty electrical fittings. The new theatre was going to be called the New Coronation, but the name was changed at the last minute and it opened as the Premier Theatre on 30 January 1928[369]. The theatre had one screen and seating for 1,200 patrons[370]. The facade has a dominant scrolled parapet with pilasters and cappings[371]. The Premier screened five nights a week, plus one night of vaudeville[372].

Hilda Hattam takes over

From August 1939, the theatre was being run by the Australian Biograph Co. Pty Ltd, a company associated with Hilda Hattam and Mr. G. W. Mitchell. During the 1930s, the theatre's policy was to screen second- and third-run films[373]. Ted Grennan joined the theatre in 1943 as a 15-year-old assistant projectionist. He remembers that the Premier swapped their films with the Kensington Theatre during the interval, when he would take a tram and pick up the other theatre's first film to

show in the second half. Often he was late returning by tram, and the manageress, projectionist, usherette and some of the audience were standing around on the footpath eagerly awaiting his return with the second half of the programme.

Part of Ted's job was rewinding the film and showing advertising slides during interval. He also recalled that Ms Hattam would stay until interval during the evening sessions then go home. She lived in the affluent suburb of Killara on the upper north shore, although she spent her youth in the less affluent suburb of Marrickville[374].

A glimpse of the day-to-day problems involved in running a suburban cinema is provided by correspondence between Hilda Hattam and the Chief Secretary's office in 1946 and 1947. In 1946 Ms Hattam complained that she had to give up selling sweets and ice creams inside the auditorium during interval as the sweet shop owners could not control the staff while in the theatre. So at interval there was a rush for the exits, starting before the first feature is finished, and often carrying small children outside in the human tide. Then after a long wait to be served in the nearby shops, people returned to their seats well after the second feature has started. She thought that "by reason of the nature of this district, the patrons here are extremely difficult to keep in the necessary state of order"[375]

Then in 1947 the local police sergeant investigated a complaint by the owners of the confectionery shop near the theatre that Ms Hattam did not allow children outside during the interval on Saturday afternoons. Ms Hattam replied that she did not give pass-outs to children at interval because some parents requested that she keep the children inside and not allow them to cross Crown Street, where there were trams and heavy traffic. Parents generally called for the children after the show[376].

Sunday film screenings

In 1951, the Premier and several other cinemas tried to break the ban on Sunday screenings. In August that year, both the King's Cross Newsreel Theatrette and the Premier Theatre started Sunday screenings. The Premier screened the Italian file *Shoeshine*, a film with a strong moral message, and a collection of newsreel films of the annual Surry Hills children's picnic over the previous ten years. In the evening, a baritone sang religious music.

The churches were campaigning against showing films on Sundays, but the Chief Secretary Clive Evatt suggested they would do better to concentrate on grave social problems instead[377]. Ms Hattam said the main reason for opening on a Sunday was to keep teenagers off the streets. "Teenagers in Surry Hills have nowhere to go on a Sunday. They have no good homes or backyards to play in. They don't read at all, so they may as well use their time watching something decent, dignified and respectable", she said. She expected the takings last Sunday to just cover her wages bill of about £45[378].

Sunday screenings were a success, and the manager of the King's Cross Theatrette said that a bus service would take his overflow audience next Sunday to the Premier Theatre, which also showed films on Sunday. The bus service would operate from 7pm[379]. In October 1951, Hilda Hattam was issued with a summons for showing films on Sunday during August 1951, as was Kenneth Cook, proprietor of the King's Cross Theatrette and Nathan Scheinwald, film distributor[380]. The next month, the operators of the Kings Cross Theatrette were prosecuted and fined, as was Ms Hattam[381].

Despite this setback, the issue was debated hotly in the press. It was pointed out that the Chief Secretary, Clive Evatt, was sympathetic to Sunday screenings, but the permits he was issuing could be challenged in court. It was time to change the law so that a very old (1908) Act of Parliament did not continue to govern public entertainment in NSW. The public were keen to see films on Sunday, as were people in London where it was an established practice[382]. Despite the popular support, the prosecutions stopped Sunday screenings for many years.

Cinemascope and the hope of better films

In February 1955, Cinemascope was installed at the Premier Theatre[383]. This was surprising, as Cinemascope was very expensive to install and the theatre was having difficulty getting films at this time. Perhaps Ms Hattam thought she could gain access to better films with a Cinemascope screen. But she complained in a letter afterwards that she was still having trouble and that a major circuit had prevented her from obtaining better films. The Premier rarely advertised, probably to reduce costs. But the film *How to Marry a Millionaire* seems to be the first Cinemascope presentation on 21 February 1955, starring Marilyn Monroe, Betty Grable and Lauren Bacall[384].

The struggle for survival

In 1957, the Department of Public Works Architect inspected the theatre, and reported that it was "shabby, but irreproachably clean". Many of the seats were very poor condition, and some in the back rows had been slashed by vandals. He said it looks like the repairing of seats is a continuous process from the number of re-covered seats and seats under repair. He thought the slashing of seats was probably a regular practice in this area[385].

Figure 75 Premier Theatre, children's Christmas party, 1942

By 1957, Ms Hattam was trying to supplement the diminishing box office by renting a room at the rear to an estate agency[386]. But by the late 1950s, the end was nigh. Television was making inroads into theatre audiences. The theatre was by then over thirty years old and in need of complete

refurbishment[387]. In May 1958, the Atlantic Oil Company Pty Ltd applied to Council to use the building as a Taxi Service Station and lockup shop[388]. The Council refused the application on zoning grounds and because it would be out of character with the area[389].

Later in 1958, Ms Hattam requested that the Council change the zoning to Industrial B. She said that the business of running a picture theatre had suffered considerably, and the sale to the Atlantic Oil Company had recently been refused by Council. She claimed it was impossible to sell the premises as a shop in that area, but it would be suitable as a factory[390]. Council refused this application, as its view was that industry should be excluded from this part of Surry Hills. But they did suggest the range of permissible uses under the current zoning, including as a private club.

In October 1958, Ms Hattam suggested to Council that they acquire the building to establish a club for young people, including remodelling the building to include four squash courts and a boxing ring, as well as amenities for these activities[391]. Ms Hattam offered the property for sale to Council for £31,000. The City Building Surveyor estimated the cost of alterations to convert the building to a club to be £14,000, making the total cost of the project approximately £45,000. The Council finance committee rejected the offer to buy the theatre as the Council did not have the money available to buy it.

In February 1959, Ms Hattam renewed the cinema licence for only three months, adding in a letter to the Chief Secretary that illness was preventing her from continuing. She was still having difficulty acquiring films, and a better supply of films would enable her to meet rising costs[392]. However, after screening the last film on 30 April 1959, the theatre quietly closed[393].

By December 1959, the building had been purchased by Martin Bros. Pty Ltd, who converted it to a wholesale grocery[392]. The Premier Theatre was formally delicensed in January 1960[395]. Martin Brothers Pty Ltd operated a self-service wholesale grocery until 1967 when financial difficulties resulted in a decrease in sales. The business went into receivership in 1967 and was advertised for sale[396].

In 1969, Cosmopolitan Motion Pictures, a Victorian theatre exhibitor and distributor of European films, sought permission to reopen the Premier as a picture theatre, but this did not eventuate[397]. By 1973, the building was operating as a tile retailer[398].

New life as a gymnasium

In 1980, the building was purchased by the former Australian squash champion Ken Hiscoe. The interior was demolished to construct a three-storey building inside the exterior walls, to operate as squash courts and a gymnasium[399]. It became Hiscoe's Recreation and Fitness Centre, opening in 1981. It is still operating as Hiscoe's Gym.

Figure 76 Premier Theatre as Hiscoe's Gym

Hilda Hattam remembered

The redoubtable Hilda Hattam was born in or near the inner Sydney suburb of Marrickville in 1902[400]. She moved to Neutral Bay by 1930, but from 1933 to 1949 lived in Edgecliff, then in Killara until 1972[401]. Her upbringing in a low-income working class suburb made her understand what it was like to be raised in Surry Hills, also a poor area. In one of her letters to the Chief Secretary, she stated that if the theatre were to close, the young and old of the district would have nowhere to go.

For several years she organised an annual children's Christmas picnic, where she paid for the excursion, entry fees and refreshments as a once-a-year treat for children who knew poverty too well. She seemed to have a social conscience, and it was her way of giving something back to a poor community that was largely ignored by the authorities and virtually everyone else. One such outing in 1942 was held at Taronga Park Zoo, with more than 300 boys and girls attending. Cakes, pies, ice cream, buns and lemonade were provided[402].

After she sold the theatre in 1959, she cared for her mother Blanche, who died in 1962. Hilda would have been 60 then. She stayed in Killara until about 1972, and then retired to Faulconbridge in the Blue Mountains by 1980[403]. She showed great perseverance with the bad behaviour of many of the locals as well as constant battles with the authorities. It is easy to feel sympathy for her, particularly her efforts to get good films at a time when the authorities turned a blind eye to unfair film distribution practices[404].

Surry Picture Palace, 455-459 Bourke Street

Furniture makers

Alexander Dean & Sons, builder and contractors, operated a workshop and timber yard at 455-459 Bourke Street from the 1880s[405]. The workshop was a one-storey brick building with an iron roof. The company operated until 1908 when it went into voluntary liquidation[406]. William Askin, furniture manufacturer, then purchased the property as well as the factory to the rear. He operated his furniture business from the rear factory, which was accessible by a lane on the left side of the block.

Smith's Moving Picture Gallery

In 1910, William Askin leased the workshop and timber yard on Bourke Street to the theatre entrepreneur John Smith[407]. Mr. Smith soon applied for a licence and approval to construct a temporary theatre. It would be an open-air picture theatre, using the existing brick walls on both sides of the block and removing the iron roof from the workshop. The plans show that the venue would be called "Smith's Moving Picture Gallery"[408].

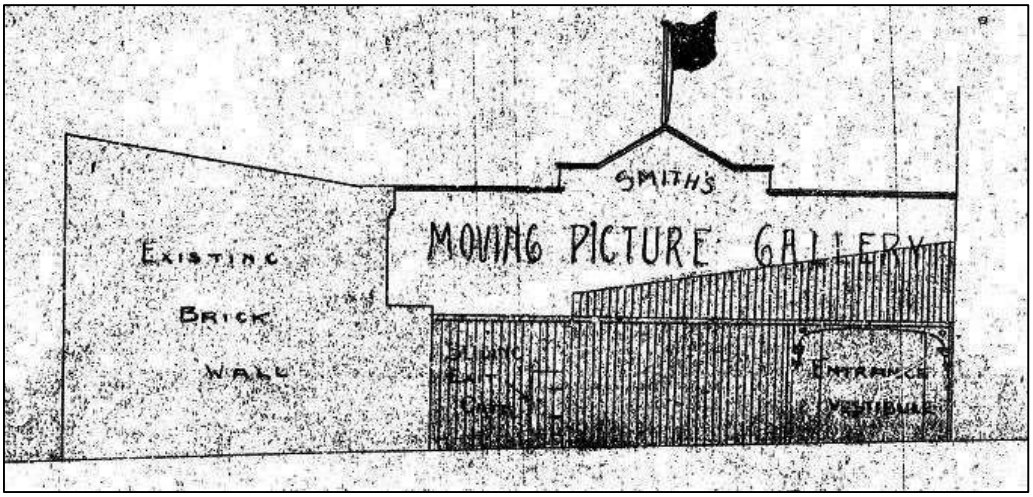


Figure 77 Surry Picture Palace plan, 1910

By 1911, the Wiseman brothers, who already operated the Royal Star Pictures in Redfern, had taken over the running of the theatre. In May they applied to erect a semi-temporary roof over the building for the oncoming cold weather[409]. They asked for an early reply, pointing out that "the cold nights were now at hand". Permission was refused by the Council, as per its policy in similar cases at the time. Undeterred by tiresome legalities, the Wiseman brothers erected the canvas roof anyway, and by August this had come to the attention of the Council. But the Council's legal advice was that it was powerless to act once a proprietor had put up a covering. It was the Chief Secretary who controlled licences, and all the Council could do was to refer the matter to him.

Timber returns

The theatre was still operating in 1913[410], but had closed by 1915. From 1916, the site was operated by the City and Suburban Timber Company for some years[411]. Today it is the location of the apartment block known as Fig Tree Gardens.

Twentieth Century Fox Building, 43-51 Brisbane Street

Twentieth Century Fox

Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation is an American film studio and distributor located in Los Angeles. It was formed in 1935 with the merger of Twentieth Century Pictures (founded in 1932 by Joseph Schenck and Darryl F. Zanuck after leaving United Artists) combined with financially-struggling Fox Film (founded in 1915 by William Fox). The studio quickly signed many young actors who would carry the studio forward for years, including Carmen Miranda, Henry Fonda, Betty Grable, Tyrone Power and the seven-year-old Shirley Temple.

Figure 78 Twentieth Century Fox logo

Zanuck returned the studio to profitability by favouring popular biographies and musicals, and during World War II record attendances allowed it to overtake RKO Pictures and MGM to become the third most profitable studio. Its biggest star, in fact the world's biggest star in the 1940s, was Betty Grable. From 1943, Fox management decided to switch from light entertainment to a more serious-minded output. Zanuck established a reputation for provocative adult films such as *The Razor's Edge*, made in 1946 from Somerset Maugham's novel, starring Tyrone Power and Gene Tierney. Fox continued with successful film versions of Broadway musicals, especially those by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

But with the approach of television, patrons slowly drifted away. In 1953, with audiences at half the levels of 1946, Zanuck gambled on an unproven gimmick, producing the first ever film in wide-screen Cinemascope. The film, the Biblical epic *The Robe*, starring Richard Burton and Jean Simmons, was a huge success and persuaded the other studios to produce films in wide-screen from then on. But by 1956, audiences were on the wane again. Zanuck tried to revive the studio with blockbuster films like *Cleopatra*, begun in 1959 but not completed until 1963 after massive cost overruns and changes to cast, director, filming locale, no script and scandals swirling around the stars Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. The film almost bankrupted Fox, and its back lot had to be sold to raise the $40 million in cash owed by the end of shooting ($1 million of which was Ms. Taylor's fee).

Figure 79 *The Robe* in Cinemascope, 1953

In 1973, Fox joined forces with Warner Brothers to co-produce *The Towering Inferno*, an all-star action blockbuster. A joint venture deal between rival studios was revolutionary in the 1970s, although commonplace today, but it was an idea that paid off handsomely at box offices around the world. From 1977, Fox achieved unprecedented success with the *Star Wars* series. The studio's highest-grossing film was *Avatar* (2009).

A film exchange and theatrette

In 1938, Twentieth Century Fox purchased two allotments in the Brisbane Street resumption area of Surry Hills (which became 43-51 Brisbane Street) at the same time as Paramount Pictures purchased three adjacent allotments (53-55 Brisbane Street)[412]. A film exchange was constructed with a small theatrette for cinema owners to view new films, and opened in 1939.

It is a restrained example of the Functionalist style with limited Art Deco detailing. The two storey flat-roofed building follows the curve of Brisbane Street with an entrance facing Peace Park. The original box office remains, with etched glass and varnished timber. An encased film vault at basement level remains as evidence of the previous film studio. The basement was used to store and distribute films. The ground floor was occupied by the NSW divisional office, while the first floor held the Australian office, as well as a theatrette. The corporate logo was incorporated in the terrazzo floor. Special features include the acoustics in the first floor theatrette and the fireproof vaults in the basement[413]. The 1978 Australian film *Newsfront*, starring Bill Hunter, Wendy Hughes and Bryan Brown, was filmed in the building.

Figure 80 Twentieth Century Fox Building, 2009

Motor Traders Association

In 1980, The Motor Traders Association (MTA) took up residence in the building. The President of the MTA said in 1980 that the 70-year-old history of the MTA was well suited to the Twentieth Century Fox building. The nostalgic theatrette will be a great asset to the MTA work, particularly in the Training Department. Prior to 1980, the MTA was located in William Street from its establishment in 1912[414].

Figure 81 MTA in the 20th Century Fox building, 1980

The Surry apartments

In 2012, the architecture firm Bates Smart transformed the former 20th Century Fox headquarters into a boutique mixed-use development known as The Surry. There are two levels of commercial space beneath 14 luxury apartments[415].

Proposed picture theatres

In the rush to exploit the early popularity of the new-fangled moving pictures, entrepreneurs occasionally submitted plans for theatres that were never built. They could have been as basic as a primitive diagram scribbled on an application letter, or as professional as detailed plans drawn by an architect. While these proposed theatres never saw the flicker of a moving picture or heard the clatter of a Jaffa rolling down the aisle, they can arguably be seen as part of the history of each location.

McNeill's Picture Theatre, 86 Buckingham Street, Surry Hills

In August, 1911, Lachlan McNeill wrote to Sydney Council requesting permission to erect an open-air enclosed picture amusement on the corner of Waratah Street and Bayswater Road, Rushcutters Bay, mentioning that plans had already been approved by the Chief Secretary's Department, subject to certain modifications. But the City Building Surveyor, Mr. R. Brodrick, did not recommend that the Council approve the plan, as the building would be only galvanised iron and wood, with no brickwork at all, and was considered unsuitable for a building of this class. Undaunted, in September 1911 Mr. McNeill submitted another application to Sydney Council to erect a picture theatre, this time on vacant land on the site of present 86 Buckingham Street Surry Hills, on the corner with Belvoir Street.

This site was vacant in 1911, according to Sands Directory[416]. Mr. McNeill had learned from his last attempt, as the new plan specified a brick wall on three sides, eight feet high, with removable canvas to a further height of six feet. The City Building Surveyor, after noting that an unsuccessful application had been made the previous November for a picture theatre on the same site, wrote that there were no structural objections to the new plan. The building plan had a note saying it was approved by Council in September 1911, subject to certain conditions[417].

Despite the Council's approval, the picture theatre was never built, and by 1913 the site was occupied by the Belvoir Street Baptist Church and Sabbath School[418].

Picture Theatre, 175 Campbell Street, Surry Hills

In March 1911, Alexander Natson applied to Sydney Council to erect a picture show on the south-east corner of Campbell and Denham Streets, Surry Hills. The site was a vacant block of land 30 feet (along Campbell Street) by 80 feet (along Denham Street) owned by Thomas C. Noonan[419].

Mr. Natson's plan for the theatre was extremely basic, being just a roughly hand-drawn rectangle with "Passage" written along the right side, and "Seats" written across the centre. Without much ado, the Town Clerk refused the application[420].

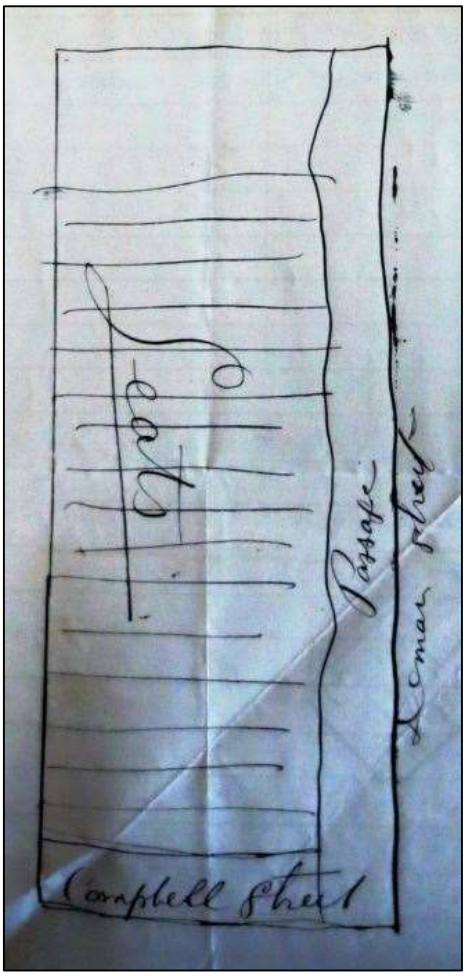


Figure 82 Plan for theatre in Campbell Street, 1911

In 1917, the land was sold[421], and A. H. Darcy constructed a boot factory on the site[422]. It is now the site of the Taylor Grand apartments.

Picture Theatre, 405-411 Crown Street, Surry Hills

From 1907, the block of land bounded by Norton, Collins and Crown Streets in Surry Hills, known as 405-411 Crown Street, was owned by the dealer George Blackmore and used as a bottle recycling yard[423]. In May 1911, Mr. Blackmore submitted detailed plans to Sydney Council for an open-air picture theatre on this site, drawn by the architect E. Lindsay-Thompson[424]. The plan was later annotated with the City Building Surveyor's approval for the application, subject to the implementation of additional items marked on the plan[425]. Despite the Council approval, the theatre was not built on this site.

In 1910, a group of entrepreneurs that included George Blackmore opened an open-air picture theatre nearby at 496-512 Crown Street (corner of Arthur Street) that was called the Crown Star No. 2 Picture Theatre. At around the same time as the theatre at 405-411 Crown Street was proposed, a second (overflow) theatre was approved in Crown Street in the present Shannon Reserve and opened in 1912. It is quite possible that the 405-411 Crown Street site was the initial site for the overflow theatre, but that it was abandoned in favour of the Shannon Reserve site.

George Blackmore continued to operate his bottle yard at 405-411 Crown Street until the Sydney Council bought the site in 1950 to build the first branch library and community centre[426]. It is now the home of the modern Surry Hills Library and Neighbourhood Centre.

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Appendix 1 – Summary of picture theatres

Darlinghurst

Australian Picture Palace/Tatler/Park/Paris, 203-207 Liverpool Street (1916-1977)
Burlington Picture Theatre, 276 Liverpool Street (1909-c1916)
Empire/Australian/Emu/Trudamite/Gaiety, 17a Oxford Street (1910-c1933)
Filmmakers' Cinema, St Peter's Lane (1973-1981)
Govinda's Cinema and Restaurant, 112 Darlinghurst Road (c1990-present)
Imperial Picture Theatre, 1-19 Yurong Street (1913-c1915)
Thripelodeon Amusement Parlour, 72 Oxford Street (1906-1907)

King's Cross

King's Cross Theatre, corner Darlinghurst Road & Victoria Street (1916-1963)
King's Cross Newsreel Theatrette, 85 Darlinghurst Road (1941-1976)
Minerva/Metro Theatre, 20 Orwell Street (1939-1969)

Paddington

Chauvel Cinema, Paddington Town Hall, 249 Oxford Street (1977-present)
Crystal Palace Theatre, 202 Jersey Road (1912-c1917)
Empire Picture Palace, 166 Hargrave Street (1914-1926)
Five Ways Theatre, 220-222 Glenmore Road (1914-1958)
Olympia/Odeon/Academy Twin Theatre, 11 Oxford Street (1911-2010)
Oxford Theatre, 383-385 Oxford Street (1912-1959)
Palace Verona Cinema, 17 Oxford Street (1995-present)
Wiseman Cinema, Glenmore and Brown Streets (dates not known)
Open-air Cinema, Sutherland and Gurner Streets (unknown start – 1909)
Moody's Pictures, Hampden Street and Glenmore Road (1911-c1914)

Redfern

Coronation Picture Theatre, Crown and Cleveland Streets (1912-1929)
Empire Picture Theatre, 303 Cleveland Street (1925-1961)
Lawson Picture Theatre, Lawson Square, south side (1926-c1960)
Redfern Picture Palace Cinema, Lawson Square, north side (1910-1934)
Regent Music Hall, 26 Regent Street (1907-1910)
Royal Star Picture Theatre, 155-157 George Street (c1911-1926)

Surry Hills

Crown Star No. 1 Picture Theatre, 460 Crown Street (1912-1914)
Crown Star No. 2 Picture Theatre, 496-512 Crown Street (1910-1926)
Encore/Third Eye Cinema, 64 Devonshire Street (1987-1999)
Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 20-28 Chalmers Street (1933-1972)
Paramount Pictures/Golden Age Theatre, 53-55 Brisbane Street (1941-present)
Premier Theatre, 525 Crown Street (1928-1959)
Surry Picture Palace, 455-459 Bourke Street (1910-c1915)
Twentieth Century Fox Building, 43-51 Brisbane Street (1939-c1979)

Appendix 2 – State Records of NSW Licensing Files

Chief Secretary's Office Theatre Licensing Files, State Records Series 15318

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Gala Theatre, Darlinghurst: State Records NSW: Files relating to licences for theatres and public halls c. 01 Jan 1895 – c. 31 Dec 1992, NRS 15318, Item 80/1102.

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